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Aunt Emma and Uncle Charles
from Billie & Maydy.
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BY THE WATERS OF SICILY

VILLA POLITI, SYRACUSE,
February 2nd, 1900.

MY DEAR LOUISE,—

A girl, a real live girl, just rid of her teens, I should say, has taken this hotel by storm!—a girl of dimples and magic laughter, who has brought all the way from England the freshness of springtime in her eyes and her cool cheeks! The ancient visitors in this establishment cannot well account for the appearance in their midst of anything so full of youth, so essentially a part of the present day,—the present day of England, I mean, for here in Sicily the present day has nothing in common with the present day of the English-speaking world.

It is really surprising to find what ancient specimens of humanity travel across the world to see ancient Greek remains. But indeed, after all, it is not so surprising, perhaps; for youth clings to youth, and is ever living in the expectant future, while old age is always looking back. Youth's "unconquerable hope," old age's winters of regret!

I cannot imagine this girl spending one single day of her glorious girlhood seeking after the tomb

of Archimedes, or studying the original plan of the five cities of Syracuse. The present is much too engrossing,—life for her has better things to offer.

When she took her seat at the breakfast-table there was a quickening in the pulses of thirty odd and old tourists seated there—just a little breath of emotion amongst them, like the fluttering of withered leaves when the summer has left the trees ; a little flutter in the women's hearts for their lost springtime ; a little flutter of regret in the hearts of the men for the old, quick blood of their youth. The many " Good-mornings " offered to the girl by the busy Germans and the stolen glances from the cautious English were answered with a smile, a smile which suggested something between the blinking archness of a kitten and the rounded beauty of Donatello's singing cherubs. She seemed to think it was a good morning and a very pleasant thing to be alive and young. Her pretty skirts were arranged with a dignity not untouched with vanity. (Personal vanity has become almost a virtue in my eyes since I have been cast among women who study Greek remains in the remains of German fashions.) She settled herself behind the would-be silver coffee-pot and jug of steaming goat's-milk.

Two old eyes from behind a stale copy of the *Weekly Times* watched her rounded wrists lift the coffee-pot and milk-jug, and pour the contents of the two vessels into her cup. She looked more than ever like a contented kitten as she licked the line of milk left on her upper lip.

I cannot express what a strong atmosphere of vigour and activity the girl had suddenly brought into the room—a feeling that something still growing, a thing of quick emotion and ready sympathy, had come among us. There was a look in her eyes which seemed to say, " Is there nothing younger

than all these—nothing really in keeping with this big white southern hotel? Must I play alone?" Her slender back stiffened as if in self-defence, as a silent protest against Time and its effects. At her call the waiter came eagerly forward. Sicilians, like all Latin races, are easily influenced by beauty, and it was many months since this poor fellow had attended to the wants of any such feminine fairness.

February is the German season in Sicily, March is the English one, and in April and May America sends over her fair daughters to sample the island and carry away specimens of its antiquities. There is nothing either youthful or beautiful in the German and English contingents who winter in Sicily.

The willing waiter bowed.

"Fresh eggs?" she asked in English, not even hesitating for a second in her choice of language or attempting poor French.

"Yes, very good eggs," the man answered in pat English.

"Then bring two; but be quick, for the day is too fine to delay over breakfast."

Two dim blue eyes looked up, and over the stale *Times*, and their owner reached out his hand for a glass dish full of very brown honey, and handed it to the girl, who looked at it suspiciously.

"Thanks, but it's not very inviting," she said, with questioning eyes; "it's such an extraordinary colour."

"It's pure Hyblæan honey; we never eat anything else for breakfast here."

The voice was burdened with reproach, and the old eyes glared at the girl.

"What is Hyblæan honey?" she asked. "I never heard of it before."

"I suppose not," he answered. "It is honey

made famous by the ancients; it is mentioned in the classics, and extolled for its beauty and purity."

"I'm very sorry," she said meekly, with a glint of laughter in her eyes, "but I prefer honey made by the bees of to-day. I will taste this, however, and give it a chance. Oh! it's horrid!" she said, making a wry face; "it tastes like sweet vinegar."

"You prefer honey made in London, where the bees are fed on beer and sugar, and where none of them have ever seen a flower in their lives, no doubt?"

"I suppose I do," she said. "Anyhow, I don't like this; it smells like pomade and tastes like vinegar."

"The smell is the scent of the asphodels, that have always grown on the Hyblæan hills; both the flower and the honey are classical."

"Everything is classical here," she said, with a sigh. "I can't even eat a modern breakfast. Did Socrates mention fresh eggs? I hope he did."

When the fresh eggs at last arrived, she opened one with avidity. That she enjoyed her breakfast there was not the slightest doubt. How quickly she munched the hard crusts, which had to be induced to soften in most of the coffee-cups round the table! How soon the small pats of white goat's-butter disappeared from her plate! A pleased smile hovered round her mouth while she ate. Suddenly her eyes were lifted to meet my stolen glance. A blush that reminded you of the pink spread over an English apple-orchard in April made me somehow ashamed of myself.

"Two eggs look greedy, I suppose?" Her eyes swept the honeyed plates of the economical Germans. "You see, I can't help being hungry, and breakfast at home was such a nice meal. I must get gradually accustomed to a breakfast of

coffee and rolls. I could never get used to that honey !”

“ Why try ? ” I said. “ There is nothing like making a good beginning. Look after your breakfast ; the dinner will look after itself. ”

I thought I caught a touch of sadness in her words “ breakfast at home,” and my mind pictured a fair English home, approached, I know not how, by green lanes ; a house gay with young people starting a new day—a day full of the excitement of young living. The girl looked as if she had played as a child under the spreading trees which give an English lawn its dignity. She was no product of the parched South—the South which knows no green hedges, but white plastered walls, defended by prickly cacti, or some blue-green southern plant, which only serves to increase the impression of dryness, and does not refresh the eyes.

The girl had been reared in a land where young things fatten and grow kind on the sweet moisture of air and earth. Here, in the South, youth is lean and pallid ; here there is no lingering ’twixt bud and bloom, no wondering-time of sweet maidenhood. On the same stems both blossom and fruit are to be seen together.

I had been caught looking, and yet I must look again, just to steal one more memory of wild roses in an English hedge. I confess myself foolish about this English girl, but she is the first link with England in my exile. I must try to find out her name ; I hope that it is a suitable one.

I will not date my letters, as they are so seldom posted on the day they are finished, and very seldom written all in one day. I have always a letter begun to you lying on my writing pad, and it grows in snatches, until I think it is about time for you to have another ; then it is finished abruptly,

and hastily addressed. After that, it may or may not be posted, according to the *facchino's* feelings on the subject. The *facchino* in a Sicilian hotel plays a much more important part than the Prime Minister does in the Italian Cabinet.

Yours affectionately,
J. C.

VILLA POLITI, SYRACUSE,
February, 1900.

MY DEAR LOUISE,—

It is astonishing how quickly vegetation buds, blooms, and fades here. You know it is only three weeks since I came to this hotel of the wonderful garden, which Theocritus haunted when Hiero was king; and everything then, owing to the long drought, was very backward. The almond-trees were only in bud, and there were practically no flowers of any kind to be seen. To-day the almond-trees have lost their pink blossoms, for a strong wind, following last night's brilliant sunset (Syracuse is famous for its sunsets), has scattered their delicate blossoms like a fall of snow over the land, and now their spreading branches are covered with tender leaves. The stocks, too, have sprung into being with magic growth. Why the scent of a stock should be peculiarly associated with old English gardens I don't know, when they grow here with far greater beauty and luxury than in England; yet every evening, when their scent steals over the garden, I find my thoughts leaving the present, and an English garden, not a Sicilian one, is before my eyes. Whom should I come across to-day, doing a little botanising on her own account, but the English girl, her young brows puckered, over the difficulty of distinguishing the famous asphodel. Two weeks ago there was not even a trace of their slender green shafts; to-day I thanked beneficent Nature for all her southern

wonders, for I was able to point out to her a patch of these delicate pink hyacinth-like blossoms, growing apparently out of a bare white rock. With charming candour she confessed that the classical flower had no deeper associations for her mind than the name of one of Rhoda Broughton's early novels, but that she had determined to see the flower itself, after the general's remarks upon the honey.

I must post myself up in a few classical legends, the sort women like, for she has taken it into her head that I can tell her all about this wonderful Syracuse. I can see that I am to be her source of information. To-day she was persistent in her desire to know something about the lives led by the seven thousand Athenian prisoners in the ancient quarries which form the crypt, as it were, of this mysterious garden.

I told her the main facts of the case: how the ancient Syracusans used their *latomias*, the enormous quarries, out of which the white stones for the building of their five cities had been hewn, as a prison in which to keep their Athenian captives after Demosthenes had surrendered. But, woman-like, she wished for more practical details. Couldn't I tell her how they lived—if they had sentries and guards stationed up above, on the edge of the precipice (where we ourselves were standing), to watch that none of the prisoners tried to scale the white walls? She said:

“Surely a man desperate for freedom would venture to climb these *latomias* by swinging himself up and onwards with the help of the various plants which hang from the cliffs!”

Curtains of ivy, strong and tree-like in growth, mingled here and there with shimmering vermouth-bushes and the weird limbs of the prickly pears,



“ It looks a delightful prison now,” she said, bending her well-shaped neck over the parapet wall which protects the edge of the precipice. “ Fancy a prison with orange, and almond, and citron-trees growing in its yard ! ”
[*To face p. 12.*]

which take such tortured shapes in their old age, covered the dazzling white cliffs of the quarries. I reminded her, however, that probably all this rich green, which makes this ancient prison a modern Garden of Eden, was not there in the days when the precipices confined the prisoners.

"It looks a delightful prison now," she said, bending her well-shaped neck over the parapet wall, which protects the edge of the precipice. "Fancy a prison with orange and almond and citron-trees growing in its yard! What a cool shade they make as you look down upon them! Everything up here is so white and dazzling. Can you smell the scent of the violets? A little breath of them came up to me just now; they are like carpets spread beneath the orange-groves."

I pointed out an early orange-tree in full bloom.

"Was there marrying and giving in marriage, do you think, amongst the prisoners? Did the Greek women ever follow their men into battle? I wonder," she went on, "if the fine ladies of Syracuse used to come and look down upon the prisoners just as we are peering down now? When the poor captives turned up their eyes to the sky and to freedom, and then looked at these wonderful rocks, so impossibly high, they must have felt that the blue heavens were mocking them. How were they fed?—like the beasts in the Zoo at home? or had they a village within the high walls, and shops, and the inevitable flocks of goats?"

I found it difficult to answer all these questions, though I was able to tell her what history has told us,—that the prisoners had in time to be removed from the quarries, but that the greater portion of them dragged out a weary existence there for eight months. There is a sentimental tale told that not a few of them were set at liberty on account of their

skill in reciting the verses of Euripides ; but I think the truth is that, the sanitary arrangements being *nil*, a pestilence broke out in their midst, and the natives of Syracuse became alarmed. Knowing that the modern Sicilian is not what we should consider sensitive on the subject of sanitation generally, we agreed that things must have been pretty bad in that way before they attracted the attention of the public.

Just to give you some idea of this wonderful garden, I must try to describe it. It has been made by carting soil and filling up the crevices in the flat, rock surface which winds round the top of the precipice. There are, of course, many curves and turns in the outline of the garden, and in no place is there any flat piece of rock of a dignified size, for a precipice invariably breaks up the cleverly designed landscape. Still, your passage through the rock-garden is never stopped, for if you follow the edge of the precipice, which is guarded by a low wall out of which pours a flood of snapdragons (*bocca-di-Leóne*, as the Sicilians call them), wild stocks, and the host of other Sicilian plants which enjoy dry food, you will presently come to a little black bridge which spans the precipice at some narrow neck. As you stand upon one of these little bridges you cannot help shuddering, for the day will probably come when the wood will rot—and Sicilians are casual about such matters ! But it is from these black bridges that you can best grasp the wonderful beauty and mystery of the place. Enough soil has been lovingly carted to this rock-garden to allow almond-trees and other southern fruit-trees, including the *néspoli*, to find depths for their roots.

The diligence of a Syracusan gardener does wonders ; as the English girl says, a Sicilian can

make a garden out of a kerosene-tin. The garden is always gay with flowers, chief among which are the scarlet geranium and deep blue iris; their brilliance of colour contrasts markedly with the white rock and the deep green, far down in the depths of the quarries.

The gardener is a good-looking fellow, who seems to live on excellent terms with Nature, and to understand her wants and peculiarities. From my window in the hotel, which is situated on the highest piece of ground on the quarry edge, you can always catch a glimpse of his blue cotton blouse showing through the early foliage of the almond-trees. He seems to spend his days carrying water or soil to some fresh bed he has made out of a neglected promontory. His blue blouse is so exactly the same colour as the sea, which forms a background to all things Syracusan, that he looks as though he had been dropped into its blue depths and caught its colour.

The English girl greatly admires the colour of his blouse, and, I think, the man himself, although she declares it is his untiring industry. "I shall make my gardener wear a blue blouse," she said. "He will give a bit of colour to the garden in the long, long winter."

There is a German staying here who wears a black mackintosh: most Germans do wear mackintoshes away from home,—it saves carrying two coats; and the Germans are masters in the economy of travel,—but this particular German has never been seen out of his. He eats in it, and it is now agreed that he sleeps in it; so that the mackintosh serves as a topcoat, an ordinary coat, a nightshirt, and what else only he himself can tell!

You made me promise that I was not to devote any of the time which I am to give to you in Sicily

by answering your letters in detail. But I must tell you how glad I am that you are really better. I constantly think how strange it is that you, to whom fresh air and sunshine are so necessary, should be a prisoner in London this winter, and that I, of all persons, should be here. As soon as there is no risk attendant on the journey, do endeavour to get to Sicily. London never suited you. In the meantime I will try to transplant your spirit as often as I can from your dull little room in William Street to Syracuse. I write to you in snatches throughout the day, and often far into the night, so I am constantly with you, dear Louise; and my hope is, that while you are reading my letters you are with me in the magic South. Just tell me if my letters bring a little sunshine into your room, and if they are as womanish as you wish them to be. I hoard up every item which I think will interest you, and will refrain from discussing foreign views on our policy in South Africa. I always post any letters which require a direct answer under separate cover.

Yours affectionately,
J. C.

VILLA POLITI, SYRACUSE,
February, 1900.

MY DEAR LOUISE,—

I am afraid I make very little use of my time here. So far as methodical sight-seeing is concerned, I am idle. One can, I admit, sit in a garden in Surrey, and spend the remainder of one's days in romancing over an English girl with a pretty face, but not, I say, in such a garden as this, and not in brilliant sunshine on a February afternoon. Nor can I, from my garden at home, see a city, once the most famous in the world, stretched out in a blue sea which bounds the horizon of the garden. The city of Syracuse looks so safe and defiant, encircled by its antique walls, which have their foundations in the Mediterranean Sea. If you look at it in the morning it sparkles like a city carved out of white marble, so fair and clean it is, with no trace of smoke rising from the flat roofs to dim the blue overhead. This absence of smoke in a large city seems to suggest, as you look at it from a distance, an unreality. Surely no starving figures walk about the cold narrow streets which one knows lie within these sea-girt walls! Stretched out, a long white neck in the blue waters, the white city seems as if it had been part of the natural landscape ever since Sicily began. It is a dream-city, too good to be true. By day a tideless sea laps its ancient walls; and when night

comes and darkness drops like a curtain on its fairness, the ramparts twinkle with a thousand lights. From the garden every evening I watch these city lights flash out upon the water, quickly, one after the other, like early evening stars; and soon the phantom Syracuse lies like a golden snake in the deep blue of night, sky, and sea.

Have I told you that between this garden of rich southern scent and sound and the sea there is one field's width of land and a fine white Government road? The road is a favourite drill-ground of some poor young army recruits, who make a pretence of marching out from the city to this point every morning and evening. At the same spot they always halt and go through their drill. In the evening the same place is chosen by some monks from the monastery of San Giovanni for their evening walk. Their brown-clad figures, tied with white girdles, stand out strangely against the skyline as they slowly wander by the edge of the cliffs, watching the raw recruits go through their drill. In Sicily, as in Italy, it is always the Army *versus* the Church. From the windows of ancient monasteries you now see a soldier's uniform, not a monk's hood; and while you linger in the cloisters, instead of the chanting of the brothers at evensong, you hear the everlasting bugle-march of Italy.

Yesterday, in the field which lies between the white road and the sea on one side and this garden on the other, quiet oxen were ploughing, while a woman walked behind, sowing the grain. There was little in choice of dignity between the grey oxen, with their high wooden collars and their slow, continuous tread, and the woman, whose bright green head-towel made a pleasant note of colour. The wide sweep of her arm was free and strong. The scene was like one of Millet's pictures. To-

day, however, the idyll is broken, there is a stir and excitement in the field: the labourers have discovered, while ploughing, some ancient tombs; so the director of the museum has arrived with some excavators.

I hope the tombs will prove worthy of having disturbed so pretty a pastoral study. Nothing later than Pagan will suffice me, for Syracuse is so well off for early Christian tombs. Now, surely, if I can see all this from my garden, I may be excused going farther?

The old general went out for a walk with the English girl to-day; he often monopolises her for hours, recounting the romances and incidents of his early days. It is rather amusing the way he classes himself with me in point of age; he talks about "we two old fogies," when as a matter of fact there is nearly twenty years' difference between us! Doris (that is the English girl's name) came to me in great urgency, asking me to write out the romance the general had been telling her. It was merely the oft-told story of an old man's love for a beautiful girl.

The girl was romantic and a bit of a hero-worshipper, as all women are, God bless them! The old man's iron cross and the deeds of his heroism appealed to her imaginative nature. She was visiting an uncle out in India, and was thrown into daily companionship with the illustrious soldier. The old man behaved as old age is often tempted to do: he mistook the young girl's admiration and esteem for love; he proposed to her, and she accepted him, nothing disturbing the happiness of their engagement until the arrival in their midst of a young fellow whom the old soldier had adopted. He was the son of a brother officer who had fallen at his side in battle, leaving a young wife with an

unborn child. The news of the husband's death hastened the birth of the child and killed the wife. The baby was left to the mercy of the father's old friend.

Youth is magnetic and attracts youth : the girl and the old man's adopted son fell in love with each other. The old man saw their love and resigned the girl, making a pretence of his own inability to bring his mind to matrimony.

The old general who told her this romance fought with Garibaldi, and Doris is immensely taken with a picture of him in the Garibaldi uniform with the fine wide sash and scarlet tunic.

Tobacco here is vile, and what I brought with me is almost finished. I know that there is a brand sold in Naples which is moderately good,—the old general is getting some. I mean to try it ; but if it is not to my taste I will ask you to send me out some, upon which, however, I shall have to pay a most exorbitant duty—but I cannot manage the rank stuff they sell here.

Your letters are invariably over-weight, and I have to pay the extra postage. I wish you would be careful in the weight of your paper, but do not curtail the quantity of your letters.

Yours affectionately,

J. C.

VILLA POLITI, SYRACUSE,
February, 1900.

MY DEAR LOUISE,—

Your letter about the *latomia* as the quarries are called, was capital; it gave me the key of many things which I had forgotten. Doris and I had a long walk in their green depths this morning, and I managed to use some of your information as if it were first-hand. You asked me to tell you what the lentisk is like, which J. A. Symonds mentions in his charming essay on these ancient quarries. It is a little shrub, not unlike barberry in appearance, which now and again shows pleasant tints of colour; compared, however, to the silver shimmering vermouth, which also kindly decorates the cliffs, it is nothing in point of beauty. The word lentisk makes a fine sound in essay-writing. Mr. Symonds could not have derived much pleasure from looking at the real plant. The vermouth is like the English southern-wood glorified. All old English plants and flowers growing here are glorified; they are so rich in size and brilliance of colour. The vermouth plant is sensitive of the least breath of wind; when it moves, a thousand pale moonlight shades float over it. In some parts, as far as the eye can reach, it has the monopoly of the white walls; it sways and moves, like a sea swollen at high-tide.

You asked if the quarries are used for any practical purposes to-day. In one of the deep dry caves I found crab-baskets stored, and an old

Sicilian spending his days there making new ones and mending broken ones. A very fine picture he looked, standing in the shadow, in his blue stocking-cap and sunburnt clothes, which had taken rich tones in their old age, worn under fierce suns. Close to where he was seated (almost inside a crab-pot of huge dimensions) a fine stretch of even white wall is utilised as a rope-factory. A child of seven or eight years was busy making the ropes; his little face was an example of southern patience and uncomplaining submission to the laws of fate. I was touched by the child-philosopher. Birds were twittering in the curtain of ivy, hanging from the cliffs. There were nests, certainly, within a stone's throw of the little figure, who walked backward and forward with the precise tread of a sentry on guard, moistening the rope or freeing the strands from knots, I don't know which. Another old man, who in point of age was as far past work as the child was too young for it, was lying in the sun watching this large-eyed breadwinner make the ropes. Familiarity, I suppose, breeds contempt even for such things as the oranges and lemons, which hung golden and ripe from the tree near the old man and the child, for no longing eyes were turned to them; and when, later on, the little rope-maker ceased his work for his midday siesta and lunch, he shared with his aged parent a piece of cool fennel and a hunch of brown bread, and drank his share of strong new wine from the grape-stained gourd like a man. I expected and hoped to see him pull down some oranges from a low tree near him, but his tastes did not incline that way; instead, he stretched himself out on his seven-year-old spine, raised his patient young face to the deep blue overhead, and slept.

This particular *latomia*, which is rented from the

Italian Government by Madame Politi, is a veritable aviary of wild birds; they sing and nest here in a "peace which passeth all understanding" to their less fortunate brethren. One of our hostess's strictest rules, which she enforces in a way not usual in casual Italy, is the protection of all living things in her garden and *latomia*. No cat prowls here to disturb the domestic calm of the goldfinches' or yellow canaries' home-life; the very walls seem alive with the chirping and twittering of thousands of busy birds. Stonechats are naturally very much to the fore in the bird society of the *latomia*, the vast wall affording a safe shelter for all the feathered kinds who find their way there. In Sicily generally the slaughter of wild birds is heartrending; their sweetest songsters are not spared, a lark adds a festa-day dainty to the work-a-day pot of macaroni.

Doris and I did a little sight-seeing to-day, of which we are very proud. We "did," as the tourists say, the Greek theatre, which is only half an hour's walk from the hotel, and if you do not object to a rough journey you can go most of the way over the ancient city of Achradina, which ~~which~~ looks like a sea of flat rocks. As you know, the Greeks, when they desired to build themselves a city, dig a tomb, cut a road, make a theatre, or raise a fine fortress, went to the mother rock. They met Nature half-way; they saw that she was willing to supply their needs,—they were the master-hewers of rock, these Greek builders; so they quickly supplied their city with a theatre which would hold twenty-four thousand people, without borrowing one cart-load of stone from half a mile distant, or touching it with mortar; these twenty-four thousand were provided with luxurious seats hewn out of the virgin rock. A theatre, not

built up in a crowded city, but dug out, open to the clear blue sky—a glorious idea for a glorious climate!

The theatre is wonderful, so perfect, so undisturbed from the fifth century before the Christian era. Doris says it is impossible to realise that we are actually sitting in the same seats as men and women sat in when they enjoyed plays and dramas, acted four hundred years before the world heard of the great life and tragedy of Jesus Christ. She will not accept the theory that the Greek actors wore masks and moved about the stage on stilts, and that women never took part in Greek plays; this last certainly would rob the drama of the salt which is the better half of its flavour nowadays.

Whilst we were “doing” the theatre, the German, in his mackintosh, studying his *Baedeker* bound in brown paper, seated himself on one of the white-rock seats directly facing the stage. He looked like some evil black bird which had suddenly alighted on the scene, and I can assure you he contrived to spoil the idyllic beauty of the place for us. He used the theatre merely as an illustration and verification of his guide-book; just glanced at it occasionally through his German smoke-goggles—which, by the way, are necessary in a sun like this, when the near world is composed of flat white rocks, while the sky and sea are still spring-blue. When the really warm weather comes, the blue will turn to a leaden grey. An hour later we passed the theatre on our return journey; the mackintosh made in Germany was still seated in that immense, silent, sunken theatre, reading its *Baedeker*.

“I must do the correct thing too,” said Doris,

“ and sit in that fine chair with the carved arms. Who, did you say, used to occupy that chair?”

I told her that it was the seat reserved for Dionysius when he came to see his dramas represented; not the author's throne of honour, but the throne of a tyrant who is quite sufficiently interesting, apart from the fact that he was an author. She ran down the flat seats until she reached what we should call the front row of the dress-circle, and without more ado seated herself on the white marble chair.

“ Come and sit beside me,” she called out, “ and tell me all about it; no, not out of *Baedeker*—I'm sick and tired of *Baedeker's Epoca Greca*: out of your own head—I won't know the mistakes.”

She put her hand on my arm, and left it there with the confidence youth places in middle age. After sitting in silence together for some time, she said:

“ What a splendid idea the primitive one was to dig out a theatre, not build one up! But I like the *cheap* top seats best, don't you? The view is so much finer. Down here we lose all the background of the blue sea and Syracuse lying basking in the sun. We must pay a visit to the city soon.”

“ To-morrow, if you like,” I said: “ I am agreeable.”

She gave a little sigh. “ I am half afraid to go,” she said. “ Looking at it from here it is the fairest thing I have ever seen, a sort of dream-city. I know the pleasant visions will never be the same again when I have seen the poverty and darkness in its streets.”

We had risen, and were ascending the crescent of flat seats.

"Am I going too quickly for you?" she asked, as she sprang from seat to seat.

I did not answer: it was the second time this afternoon she had unconsciously reminded me of what I am a fool ever to forget. When we reached the highest seat, she declared again that she would have always chosen to sit with the "people."

"But you would not have been able to hear what the actors said," I rejoined. "Just look at the immense size of the theatre: the German in his mackintosh looks quite small from here!"

"I don't suppose he feels it," she said, and smiled in a way which showed her best dimple and made me feel a rare old fool.

"I don't think I should have minded much if I hadn't heard. Greek plays must have been awfully dull. Up here, when you got bored, you could always look at the ships in the harbour, and see what was going on in the town."

"It was here, from these very seats," I said, "that the ancient Syracusans watched the famous fight at sea between the fleets of Athens and their city."

"I can't imagine those famous fleets," she said, "if they were only galleys rowed by oars. I'm really too modern to throw my imagination so far back into the past. How much of *our* story have you written?" she asked in the same breath. "I think I am tired of *Epoca Greca* for to-day. Have you got it in your pocket? Read it to me while I try to take in the beauty of this wonderful world. My ignorance of all things classical is positively bewildering; beyond the mere beauty of the scenery, which is amazing enough to northern eyes, seen for the first time, everything has a thousand meanings which I don't understand. It is like throwing pearls before swine, for I can only see the

things and feel their beauty with purely modern eyes. Just think of the poor scholars who are steeped in classics, who know the past, and understand it much better than they do their own day—think that they must live and die, only imagining all those scenes that ignorant I am living amongst and taking for granted every day!”

“I believe those students prefer studying Greek remains and the footprints of the Sikelians in Sicily, under the cover of the British Museum roof; they would not be moved by the blue sky or the southern atmosphere as you are; they search after facts, you illuminate facts with sentiment.”

“Don’t try to excuse my ignorance,” she said; “it’s disgraceful the way English girls are educated, except the ones who aren’t like me.”

“Don’t bother your head about such things,” I said.

She looked at me in surprise.

“Leave it all to Germans in mackintoshes and to old men like myself.”

“You prefer a pretty fool,” she said, “to an intelligent woman?”

“Intelligence has nothing to do with book learning,” I said. “Some of the most intelligent men I have ever known have not been able to read.”

“But I can read—that’s just what’s the matter with my education. I can read, but I only enjoy reading modern fiction. Reading has killed my power for either original thought, or the best thoughts of other people. Children lose most of their originality and quaint ideas after they have learned to read.”

“Will you not permit your children to read?” I asked.

“I don’t know what I shall do,” she replied. “With reading comes the desire to read; with

womanhood comes the desire to peep further into human nature. You think that novels teach you what you want to know; you read, and read, and read, until real life becomes awfully tame compared with books. Then you grow old enough to know that novels are not true. Ah, that is a horrible time! You are thrown back upon yourself, your mind has lost its power of original thought, it is saturated in the sentiment of modern fiction, and too disturbed and unbalanced to study deeper things. A thousand girls will tell you the same thing."

"And yet, after all this, you would have me try my hand at writing a love romance; you are actually waiting for me to begin."

"It's like morphia," she said; "you must break the patient gradually of the habit. I haven't looked at a novel since I came here."

When I had finished reading my poor attempt, there was silence between us for a few minutes.

"Will it do?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said. "I hadn't pictured the girl like that; she's too—too . . . Oh, I don't know how to express it—too English, too unromantic, not individual enough."

"I think probably that it was her naturalness and her English fairness that were her chief charms in the soldier's eyes."

"I pictured her——" She paused to think, with dark and mysterious-looking eyes. "Not such a girlish girl as that. The sort of girl who is always a *woman*—a woman with a temperament, I think novelists say."

"But this one was to be a true girl; I thought you had enough of the conventional heroine in fiction."

“ Perhaps,” she said doubtfully; “ but I can’t imagine a clever man, a man who had done so much and seen so much, falling in love with a simple, ordinary sort of a girl like that. I like the old man; he’s far, far too good for her.”

“ Nothing is too good for youth,” I said; “ it is the magic of the world.”

“ If it is,” she said, “ it is too cruel that you cannot realise the value of what you possess for such a short time in life.”

“ The very fact of realising it would be to tinge its gold with grey. Youth takes everything for granted; it has not learnt to bow the knee. When reverence, gratitude, and meekness creep in, youth with its golden wings takes flight.”

“ Why is youth so charming, then, if it knows none of these fine virtues?”

“ Charm never waits for cold description or analysis,” I said. “ What you can describe does not charm; what *charms* comes under the heading of no moral virtue.”

As we walked home I remarked that the romance was utterly unnatural.

“ Why so?” she said. “ I think the girl was a fool to choose the young man; he was totally uninteresting, just like every other University thing in well-cut clothes.”

Call me a fool, if you like, Louise, but her last remark pleased me mightily, although I know there is not a grain of real human nature in it. It’s just a girl’s sentimental theory.

We have but little news of the war here. One German lady with whom Doris and I have enjoyed many hours of pleasant conversation, but with whom we had carefully avoided the subject of the war, amused us very much to-night. Some more than usually untactful ancient Americans brought

the subject forward. The German lady looked at Doris and smiled.

“Süd Africa, I think taboo. We have been good friends while we have been together in this hotel; I would prefer to part the same, so Süd Africa taboo.”

We took her sound advice, and Süd Africa has been tabooed during the whole of our visit.

She is a granddaughter of Mendelssohn, and has some capital stories to tell. She can speak seven or eight languages with great rapidity and with an extravagant German accent. One of her stories about Heine I know will amuse you—I had never heard it before. He was staying in a hotel in some German watering-place when he heard some English ladies, whom he knew, complaining of the bad tea which was invariably served in German and French hotels. Heine told them that he could not understand the cause of their complaint—that the tea *he* got in that hotel was excellent, as good as any one could get in England. To prove it he invited them to tea in his rooms. The ladies arrived punctual to the moment, but no tea was forthcoming. Their host for the third time rang the bell and demanded the reason. The waiter looked uncomfortable, and hesitated to explain. Heine insisted.

“The English ladies have had no tea this afternoon,” he said, “so you cannot have any either; you always have their tea after they have finished.”

There was a great laugh at Heine’s expense, for the English ladies had brought their tea out from England with them.

This same German lady has lent Doris a copy of Cicero’s impeachment of Verres. Cicero spent some time in Sicily examining witnesses and col-

lecting facts in support of his charges in the prosecution he had undertaken to conduct against Verres. His description of Syracuse is, I believe, world-famous; but if, like myself, you are not familiar with it, please read it at once. It is the most beautiful piece of word-painting you have ever read. It seems impossible that it was written seventy years before the Christian era, for it is much more sympathetic and infinitely more realistic than anything that has been written on the subject since. Read the orations against Verres right through; you will not be bored with them, I assure you, for he works you up as he worked up the feelings of the people of Rome when he told them how he had seen with his own eyes the glorious temples of Syracuse, of Segesta, and of Enna robbed of their gods, and the beautiful cities of Sicily despoiled of their ancient splendour by the greed of Verres. He gives a description of each town he visited, which makes this volume much the best handbook to ancient Sicily.

Yours,
J. C.

VILLA POLITI, SYRACUSE,
February, 1900.

DEAR LOUISE,—

Inspired by Cicero, Doris and I made a pilgrimage into the city of Syracuse to-day. She has asked me to call her Doris; she is getting home-sick for the sound of her Christian name, she says. She wanted to worship in the cathedral. Think of her! that fair English girl kneeling devoutly on the marble floor of that vast Pagan temple; for, although certain forms of the service have been altered, the Latin Church in Sicily is wonderfully Pagan still. First we examined the outside of the building, where the big white columns of the ancient temple of Minerva have been built right into the structure of the modern walls, or, rather, the modern walls have been built round these columns. Seen from the outside, these pillars are almost flush with the wall, but inside they stand out amazingly big, a stately reminder of the greatness of the past. Where, one asks oneself, will the present wall be when the same length of time has passed over its standing-ground? I believe when all this is past and gone these Pagan pillars will still remain giants of the primitive past, when man worshipped the forces of nature which produced the necessities of life. Beyond these pillars is the ancient font, which is now used for the baptism of infants into the Church of Christ; it once came in for libations in the temple of Bacchus.

The organ lofts are fine examples of Renaissance art; their gold tracery makes a rich splash of light in the colourless building. We had barely time for a hurried glance at these things before the service commenced. I think if you had seen Doris kneeling there, her English sailor-hat balanced on her coils of fair hair, praying amongst a gathering of dark, sunburnt country peasants, and pale frail old people, dwellers in the dark streets which Doris had so dreaded seeing—streets whose houses know neither fires nor sun—if you had been there to see the contrast I think even you would have experienced the difficulty I had in keeping my throat in its normal swallowing condition. I agree with her in discouraging the habit which our countrymen adopt abroad of “doing” the cathedrals and churches during divine service.

To-day a monk was preaching, and I much regretted that I could not understand his undoubted eloquence; for never before, with the exception of a service I attended in the Jesuit Church in Palermo, have I listened to such an uninterrupted flow of language. A fine figure he looked, standing at the chancel steps, dressed in his brown robe and immense white girdle and rosary. I noticed that the better-off Syracusans in the congregation, those who could afford to pay a sou for the luxury of a chair, appeared to be totally lacking in reverence; but to make up for the irreverence of those who were in a position to wear hats and cheap feathers there was the behaviour of the simple country peasants and the humbler residents in the city. They were indeed a striking example of good breeding; their devout demeanour commanded respect. The dignity of bearing among these poor Sicilians is marvellous. Some of the old men had faces so finely featured that they might have been

carved out of marble, only that their skins were a warm brown from exposure to the sun. Sicilian repose is a thing undreamt of until you have seen these old men, dressed in their native costume, their limbs unhampered with "Sunday blacks," their slim ankles bound round with thongs of rough goat's hide, their bright blue-cotton knee-breeches fitting closely, while their brown coats of many shades hang with time-worn ease from slightly bent shoulders.

Doris said that a group of such men kneeling in front of some popular side-chapel was exactly like the Italian pictures of the wise men worshipping the Magi. She loved to see the little children playing about the vast building quite fearlessly; they did not disturb the worshippers in the least, she said, and as it is their Father's House, why should little ones be made to keep a painful silence, and be forced into pretending to enter into the service which they do not understand?

There were two little ones whom I watched; the elder was not four years old. They toddled about the great building, hand in hand, visiting all the side-chapels, but never forgetting to bow their baby heads before the pictures of Our Lady and her crucified Son after they had admired all the bright ornaments on the gaily draped altars, and gazed with young and wondering eyes on the hundreds of silver hands and hearts which had been hung up as tokens of gratitude and faith for the recovery of some loved one who had been prayed for and relieved. No doubt these two mites had known some poor woman who had saved her cents and deprived herself of bread to be able to purchase a silver heart to leave in the chapel of Our Blessed Lady. In course of time they found their way to the chancel steps. Not in the least afraid, they stood close to

the eloquent monk ; nor was he put out by their presence, for the next few moments he addressed his congregation with his hand stroking the small dark head of the little girl, while both children were busy fingering and counting the beads of his fine rosary. When they grew tired of standing still, and the crucifix and the beads had lost their charm, they wandered, still hand in hand, in and out of the kneeling congregation, until at last they came across their mother, who smiled to them with the gentle smile of the Italian mother. As we looked at that young mother we recognised how simple a matter it was for the old Italian painters, such as Bellini and Francia, to find models for their sweetly divine women. They had only to go into the meanest street, and they could find a dozen to choose from. This particular mother had her slender figure veiled in the soft black shawl which serves the modest poor Sicilian woman for Sunday bonnet and cloak ; it was folded closely over her head, and covered half her cheeks like a nun's coif, and then fell out in loose long lines to her knees. The art of getting a shawl to hang like that is still a puzzle to Doris, for no pin is ever given the chance of tearing the ancient fabric. This woman's mother had no doubt worshipped in the same shawl, and probably her mother before her.

“ She is so proud of the little man-child in her arms,” Doris said in a whisper. “ Look ! such a precious joy fills her that she is not even troubled by the fact that there is so little to eat at home, now that this last dear one has come to share it, that she herself is almost always hungry. But I suppose true mothers almost enjoy that sort of hunger, don't they ? Her home is a basement, no doubt, cold and damp ; but *it is* her home, the house where

her children were born." *Ad ogni uccello suo nido è bello*,—To every bird its nest is fair.

Syracuse is just as deceitful as Doris feared. Who could ever imagine, as he looked at it from the garden that we both love, the darkness, the smells, and the sorrow that her outward fairness hides, the poverty and hunger that now fill her streets? How, indeed, are the mighty fallen as regards Syracuse, first of all cities in the days when the greatness of the world centred round the blue African waters!

For one so young and full of vigorous girlhood, Doris has a very tender heart for all things poor and suffering, and a gentle heart is the true definition of a gentlewoman or man, I think; for a gentle heart could never dictate a vulgar or coarse action. I have often known women who appeared on a slight acquaintance to be well bred, but on further intimacy they have betrayed what is generally known as the "cloven hoof," and, without one exception, the action that betrayed that lack of breeding has always come from the absence of a gentle heart, a want of tenderness for others' feelings.

You must remember that this very cathedral about which I have been writing is the actual fabric of the temple of Minerva, so gloriously described by Cicero in his impeachment of Verres. While speaking of a series of cavalry pictures, which once adorned the walls of the temple, he says: "Nothing could be more noble than those paintings; there was nothing at Syracuse that was thought more worthy going to see. These pictures Marcus Marcellus, though by that victory of his he had divested everything of its sacred inviolability of character, out of respect for religion, never touched. Verres, though, in consequence of the long peace and loyalty of the Syracusan people, he

had received them as sacred and under the protection of religion, took away all these pictures, and left naked and unsightly those walls, whose decorations had remained inviolate for so many ages, and had escaped so many wars. Marcellus, who had vowed that if he took Syracuse he would erect two temples at Rome, was unwilling to adorn the temple which he was going to build with these treasures which were his by right of capture. Verres, who was bound by no vows to Honour or Virtue, as Marcellus was, but only to Venus and to Cupid, attempted to plunder the Temple of Minerva. The one was unwilling to adorn gods in the spoil taken from gods, the other transferred the decorations of the Virgin Minerva to the house of a prostitute."

He next goes on to extol the wonders of the folding-doors of the temple.

"But now what shall I say of the folding doors of that temple? I am afraid that those who have not seen these things may think that I am speaking too highly of, and exaggerating everything I am able to prove this distinctly, O judges, that no more magnificent doors, none more beautifully wrought of gold and ivory, ever existed in any temple. It is incredible how many Greeks have left written accounts of the beauty of these doors."

With biting sarcasm he passes on, after having given a detailed account of the treasures Verres took from the temple, to his desecration of the city.

"For the Sappho which was taken away out of the town-hall, affords you so reasonable an excuse, that it may seem almost allowable and pardonable. That work of Silanion, so perfect, so elegant, so elaborate (I will not say what private man), but what nation could be so worthy to possess, as the most elegant and learned Verres? Certainly,

nothing can be said against it. If any one of us, who are not as happy, who cannot be as refined as that man, should wish to behold anything of the sort, let him go to the Temple of Good Fortune, to the Monument of Catulus, to the Portico of Metellus; let him take pains to get admittance into the Tusculan Villa of any one of these men; let him see the forum when decorated, if Verres is ever so kind as to lend any of his treasures to the aediles. Shall Verres have all these things at home? Shall Verres have his house full of, his villas crammed with, the ornaments of temples and cities? Will you still, O judges, bear with the hobby, as he calls it, and pleasures of this vile artisan? a man who was born in such a rank, educated in such a way, and who is so formed both in his mind and body, that he appears a much fitter person to take down statues than to appropriate them."

Then he goes on working up the indignation of the people with his vehemence and masterly eloquence, and at the same time handing down to us a faithful account of the riches and magnificence of Pagan Sicily.

Doris and I are constantly in Cicero's company now. We cannot be too grateful to the German lady for the introduction. He is so enthusiastic, so deliciously modern. By this time, however, I expect you will also have made his acquaintance, so I will not again give myself the trouble of quoting him at length. Cardinal Newman in Sicily is pleasant reading, but thin and unsatisfying after Cicero.

Newman speaks of the island very tenderly; it seems to have taken hold of him and affected him just in the way it does affect every one who spends more than a day or two on its shores. He was terribly ill during his journey through the island,

and alludes repeatedly to the horrible discomforts he underwent from dirt and fleas.

I wish that the Villa Politi had been in existence when he was in Syracuse : what rest and peace he would have found in the clean white hotel, and the sunny rock garden, with the deep green of the cool *latomia*, Theocritus's *latomia*—to wander in, when his mind sought silence and the repose of deep shadows ! I wish he had written “ Lead, kindly Light,” from this lovely garden : the evening light on Syracuse might have inspired it ; but it was composed, I believe, on board an orange boat on his return journey from the island to Marseilles.

Yours affectionately,
J. C.

VILLA POLITI, SYRACUSE,
February 19th, 1900.

DEAR LOUISE,—

This has been a day of happy idleness; indeed, our hearts were too full of rejoicing to think of Greek remains, for the Catania paper (the one we rely on here for the truest account of the war) this evening contained the news that Kimberley is relieved, and now we are, as you can imagine, all impatience for the arrival of the English newspapers of the 16th. The German in the mackintosh and the other waterproofed sons of the Fatherland are not prepared to accept the news; their general attitude towards South Africa forbids us questioning them on the subject. Doris thanks God she cannot understand German, for she declares she would have poisoned some of them long ago. Their language sounds ugly enough at any time, she says, but when it is used for laughing at the reverses to our brave troops it is outside the limit of civilised tongues. It is hard indeed to put up with it, knowing that those very Germans will not be near us to see our rejoicing when the victory is ours. The old general's Italian manservant, who accompanies his master everywhere and stands behind his chair at dinner, was very amusing when the good news came. The master and servant fought together with Garibaldi, I believe, so there is a bond of sympathy between them. The servant was born in Trieste, and looks a first-class villain; Doris declares he is one. Like all north Italians,

he has the greatest contempt for Southern Italy. Well, he announced to his master to-day that as he had not been drunk for sixteen years (a brave lie!) he intended to get royally drunk on the days Kimberley and Ladysmith were relieved. Whilst Doris and I were walking past the small *albergo*, near the Greek amphitheatre, Rumanio, as he is called, appeared at the door. Recognising us as friends of his master and guests at the same hotel, he dashed out to meet us, and in voluble Italian told us that he had just heard that Kimberley was relieved. And there was a look in his eyes as much as to say, "So you can tell my master that my great drunk has begun."

We listened to the conversation which followed between the pretty daughter of the house and the villain of Trieste.

"What have you got to eat?" he asked, looking round at the nakedness of the poor little inn with the scorn of the rich North for the starving South.

The girl shrugged her shapely shoulders, and told him, "Bread and cheese and fennel."

He expressed his fine disdain by the mere raising of his eyebrows.

"What do you want more?" she said,—“roast Christian? There is none ready now, but if you will return in two hours I will go to the amphitheatre and fetch some.”

There was a roar of laughter at the fine “gentleman’s gentleman,” and we heard no more; but the fellow being a fine figure of a man and the girl a pretty flirt, you may be sure it did not end there. During the interview the old mother, with her head wrapped up in an orange-coloured handkerchief, had been standing in the shadow of the doorway. The virtue of even the poorest maiden in Sicily is strictly guarded.

I can think of nothing else but Kimberley, and how to find means of verifying the good news. England has never seemed so far off.

Your affectionate brother,
J. C.

P.S.—Yes, Madame Politi is German by birth, which accounts for the cleanliness of her hotel; but her love for Sicily is greater than for the Fatherland. A warm climate is more enjoyable when your bedroom is under the supervision of a German housekeeper. Doris says Madame Politi is a Sicilian when she is working in her garden, and a German when she is putting her house linen in order.

VILLA POLITI, SYRACUSE,
February, 1900.

DEAR LOUISE,—

To-day was market day in Syracuse, so we idled along the Catania road in order to meet the country people coming in on their good mules and donkeys, laden with their farm produce. What pleased us most was the dignified appearance of the old ladies mounted on their black donkeys. Those slender, sure-footed beasts are well burdened, I can tell you, for the Sicilian housewife places across the beast's back a copious saddlebag, which reaches within a foot or so of the ground on either side. The entire weekly produce of her farm she contrives to stow into the capacious pockets, while she herself, with a fine dignity, sits perched up between them. Her legs, finding no place to hang themselves on either side of the donkey, cling comfortably round its neck; but even this extraordinary mode of riding is not sufficient to upset the composure or complacent expression of an aged Sicilian. When the woman returns in the evening from market, the saddlebags will be just as uncomfortably full, but polenta and brown bread will then be substituted for the lean chickens and green fennel.

The slow, even pace at which these beasts of burden travel is amazing! Their gentle-faced riders, who generally go to market in their best black shawls, know no such disturbing element as impatience; the great enemy *unrest* has not entered into their philosophic existence.

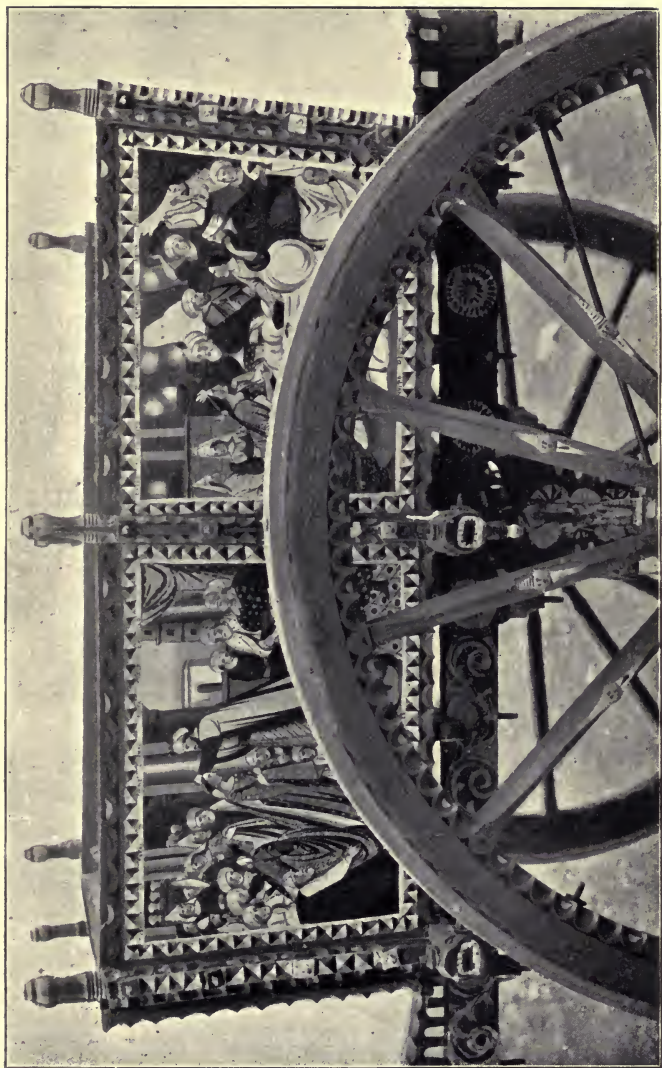
Doris wondered why we never saw a young girl riding into market—why old women were left to travel the long white dusty roads alone. “The busy housewives should send the girls into the city to sell the fennel. Look! that is the same woman we met early this morning; she is only this distance on her homeward way, and it is now four o’clock.” In the morning we had been driving to the famous castle of Euryalus, and for Sicilian horses our pair were travelling at a good pace. We passed the woman riding her slender-legged, fine-haired, black donkey four or five times, for Doris had insisted on our coachman stopping his horses at brief intervals while she climbed the white stone wall which separated the dusty highroad from the fields full of flowers and ancient olive-trees.

“Look!” she cried, holding up a big bunch of wild anemones, “did you ever see such a lovely colour?”

Held so close to her violet eyes, the lie I told was a brave one; but I knew she loved no personal flattery and adored the wild winter flowers. We had bought some fine Greek-shaped vases made of the rough Sicilian pottery; the soft buff of their lightly baked clay went well with the brilliant pink of the small campion which spreads itself like a carpet over the flat country at this time of the year. Just as Doris was climbing the wall to reach the highroad the woman on the quiet-footed ass passed us again. She bowed, and said with a smile—a gentle smile of tolerance for our ignorance—“They are only wild flowers, signorina; they grow everywhere.”

“But they are beautiful, are they not?”

“*Già, già,*” she said, looking admiringly at the pretty flushed face, “good enough in their way.” She meant, “Not good enough for you, who should



“ A Sicilian cart itself, you must know, is like no other work-a-day cart on God’s earth, but rather like some gaudy curio, some well-preserved relic of the Middle Ages.”
[To face p. 44.]

have a lover more gallant than to let you gather *wild* flowers."

"Isn't it curious," Doris said, "that the loveliest wild flowers which grow in their lovely land are in their eyes worth nothing? They cost nothing, so they are worth nothing. It is all in keeping, I suppose, with their childish inability to understand why we should vex ourselves over the suffering of soulless animals. 'They have no souls, signorina; what does it matter? it is the soul that suffers.'"

As we were speaking a cart passed, laden with young people; we counted eleven in it altogether, and the donkey drawing it was not much bigger than a sheep. Such a riot of colour as that small cart contained it would be impossible to convey to you, for colour is never colour until seen under a southern sun and on a snow-white road.

A Sicilian cart itself, you must know, is like no other work-a-day cart on God's earth, but rather like some gaudy curio, some well-preserved relic of the Middle Ages. It is shaped like a servant's box and made of the toughest oak. The box is poised high in the air on the top of so elaborately carved and painted an axletree that it is well worth your while to kneel on the dusty road and get under the box part to study the workmanship, and the intricate beauty of the design. The wheels of the cart, from the wretched condition of the country roads, require to be of enormous height; this gives the vehicle a most absurd appearance; but if you journey long in Sicily you will find that the highest wheels can get buried in mud. The four sides of the cart are painted to represent famous biblical and historical incidents. Tell shooting at the apple, and the Crucifixion, are the most popular subjects. These gorgeous carts cost a great deal of money, and are objects of rivalry in families;

the elaborate brass-mounted harness of the mules, with its truly exquisite embossed trappings, together with the cart, form a farmer's most precious family heirloom. I am not sure that the mules are not heirlooms as well, for I am convinced that mules are far too clever and obstinate ever to die! The life of a Sicilian mule should be a very interesting subject if it ever comes to be written.

As we watched the fantastic cart, piled high with gay young people, driving slowly along the sunny southern road, Doris, divining somehow that my thoughts had fled to green England, cried :

“ Not a bit of real green anywhere to temper the scene ; only the blue-green cactus leering at us from over the plastered walls, and the silver-grey olive-trees shimmering in the sun in the white, rock-strewn fields ! The glory of the pink campion, the blue of the blue anemone, that cart full to bursting with red and yellow head-towels, are bits of the South. Even that woman, far on ahead on her donkey, in her softly falling mantle of black, creeping along between the white walls, does nothing to sober the scene ; it is all one blaze of southern light, a light which lays bare every grain of colour hidden under duller skies.”

“ If I were the girls in that overladen cart,” she went on, “ I would prefer riding a nice donkey. The old lady on ahead has much the best of it, I think.”

“ Don't you see,” I answered, “ that the cart holds the mother and father as well as the pretty daughters ? The Sicilian signorina is always safely guarded, even when she rides a black donkey from the hills into Syracuse to sell two francs'-worth of farm produce. Her mother or her grandmother always sits on the same beast behind her ; the lover

gets the smile from his sweetheart first, and the scowl from her chaperon the second after."

"How absurd it is! Just as if anything would happen to her! What a dreadful life they lead in spite of their air of sweet complaisance! I believe they are too well-bred to complain. I wish I could look as near an ideal princess as some of those girls!"

"They do not complain because they know no better. After all, most people have to be told they are actually unhappy or happy before they are quite aware of it. A husband in Sicily amongst the working classes is often in the habit of locking his womenfolk in the house and taking the key in his pocket out into the fields."

"Perhaps that is why there is always a face at a window in Sicily?"

"Yes," I said, "undoubtedly that is the reason. Sometimes it is the wistful, tragic face of a neglected wife, at others it is the smiling glance of some young girl eager to anticipate the excitement of her first romance; the breath of intrigue is the first a Sicilian male or female infant breathes, it is the last that takes leave of him."

In a field, a little farther on, Doris spied some fine blooms of the double red Sicilian wild rose. It is not by any means common round Syracuse, and we were delighted with our new prize; it is a deep red rose, not at all unlike the crimson Rambler. While we were praising its beauty and thinking ourselves mighty clever, the black-cloaked figure on the donkey passed us once again. With exactly the same dignity of greeting, she said something to the effect that it was the tortoise that won the race, after all; although we had two fast horses, she would be home first if we lingered so long on the road. "But it is of no consequence to the

signorina," she said. " She is only out for pleasure. I have much business to attend to."

" Wouldn't I love to know the nature of her business!" Doris said with laughing eyes. " No doubt that pretty gracious head so elegantly poised under the soft black shawl and those gentle tragic eyes are filled with nothing deeper than the best way to spend her few *soldi*, or how to get the better of the shopman to whom she will sell her weary hens."

I am afraid you will think Doris and I are not serious enough about our Sicily, and Sicily is very serious. Sicily is like a woman with a frivolous face and tragic eyes There is sunshine and beauty all over the land, and a burden of hunger and woe on her children.

We talk of laughter-loving Italy; it may have been even so once in Sicily, but to-day it is otherwise. The beauty of the women and the dignity of the men are always intensified by the veiled sorrow in their eyes. If one could, without spoiling the beauty and simplicity of the island, lift the yoke of poverty from off the shoulders of these poor creatures, what a home of laughter and sunshine Sicily might be, a veritable land " with milk and honey blessed"! But then, again, this cruel poverty is the mother of native ingenuity, and her offspring is beautiful Simplicity; remove the one and you kill the others, and so, from the artistic point of view, let us keep dear Sicily as it is, and reverence the poverty which with her is so seldom depravity, and thank God there is still one little corner of Europe where the thumb of progress has not left its vulgar mark. So you see, there are two Sicilies to write about, read about, and dream about, aye indeed, and to weep about, too: the ancient Sicily which the German " does " with a

Baedeker in a mackintosh, and the other Sicily—I cannot call it modern, for that were a rank heresy, for nothing in Sicily is modern or common—the Sicily Doris and I love and understand best—the Sicily of beauty and tragedy and flowers and sunshine.

The tobacco I told you of, which the general was to persuade me into smoking, is vile stuff. I will look to you to send me some, any decent sort, the next time you are in the neighbourhood of the Army and Navy Stores.

Your affectionate brother,
J. C.

VILLA POLITI, SYRACUSE,
February, 1900.

DEAR LOUISE,—

I should have written some days ago to thank you for the tobacco, which is excellent and cheap at the price, but my lengthy letter-writing is not so easy now as I am really very busy doing nothing. And doing nothing is a very exacting occupation. The more you give in to it the more it expects of you, and where one half-hour's smoke in the sun after lunch sufficed me a month ago, I now find myself seated in the same chair watching the same two lizards disporting themselves on the white wall of the front portico when Madame Politi calls out from her little room that *our* tea is ready. Besides, Doris is urging me to finish her story.

You agree with me, of course, that it was quite unnatural for the young girl of my small romance to love the elderly soldier in the way that we all like to be loved. Doris declares that if the young man had never turned up they would have lived happily ever afterwards. She does not seem to recollect that although a wife may promise to love, honour, and obey her husband, she cannot answer for the behaviour of her own heart. So many wives, as you know, recognise that it is safer for their own peace of mind to live in the country; there are fewer temptations for their husbands and they are less likely to notice when their wives lose their youthful attractiveness. They do not run the gauntlet of comparison with fairer women every

day. Wives who consider themselves the possessors of good and true husbands have told me this. The same women have refused to have a young governess live in the house to teach their children. "I will not put temptation in John's way," declared one. "If you are satisfied with your prisoner, keep him, madam," I said; "but I should prefer letting the goat wander who wished to wander. Tethered beasts strangle themselves in their own ropes. Besides, is he worth the effort?"

"Do you like our heroine the better," I asked Doris, "now that the story is developing?"

"Yes," she said, "much better. Still, she is not worthy of him. The sweet courtesy with which he treats her, his tenderness for her youth and ignorance! Just fancy a chit of a girl deserving and keeping the love of a man like that!—a man whom any beautiful woman must have flattered and spoilt. She was incapable of giving him the love affected by a boy who was busy growing a moustache."

"But men who have seen the world and have known flattery are the very ones who appreciate the direct simplicity of an unspoilt girl. It is the boys who admire the rouge-pot and brilliance of a woman of the world. In your old age you return to the simple things of life, bread and Irish stew for lunch. Youth must have a full menu to tickle his vanity. His love for her was perfectly natural, her treatment of him was natural, too; it was human nature, my dear. Put yourself in her place. Could you marry an old man?"

Her eyes evaded mine and her breath came quickly for a moment.

"I think I am rather like her," she said "I

am rather that type of girl, but I am perfectly certain I would never have jilted the V.C."

"He gave her up," I said.

"She made him do it. She knew he loved her with a father's and lover's love in one. A father will sacrifice himself for the happiness of his child, a lover thinks only of himself."

Do you notice how she evaded with a woman's quickness my question, "Would she herself marry an old man?"

In my next letter I will tell you about the famous catacombs of San Giovanni, which are quite close to this hotel. You will be asking what is there not quite close to this hotel, but that is more than I can tell you, for every day brings forth some fresh wonder. Yet there is one thing missing. Each morning we go up to the roof of the house and come down shaking our heads. "No, it is not there. Mother Etna means to cheat us," Doris said; "she is hiding herself, like De Wet, close by, over the house. When she does come out it will seem so absurd to think that Etna has been there all this time while we were living in sublime ignorance of her whereabouts."

It is the fault of the sirocco, Madame Politi says. The sirocco does and undoes wonders in Sicily; it seems to be always blowing.

Doris asked the *facchino* who cleans her boots, about which she is fastidiously neat, why he had neglected them for three days.

"It does not matter much in Syracuse," she said; "but still, I have got into the habit of wearing them black. I should like them cleaned."

The *facchino* shrugged his shoulders.

"Why have you not cleaned them?" she asked impatiently.

“ The sirocco, signorina ; I cannot clean boots in the sirocco.”

“ I certainly can’t walk far in a sirocco,” Doris said to me afterwards. “ I feel as limp as a wet chamois leather ; but as this particular hot wind blows almost every day in the year, we must, I suppose, remain content with dirty boots.”

Very few fresh visitors have come to the hotel, and we are getting to know the habits of the ones who have been with us remarkably well. There is one rather more than usually hungry German, who finds the best food which Madame Politi can procure in unambitious Syracuse not enough to satisfy his Teutonic system. He has now adopted a plan at table which amuses Doris very much. If he has been eating from some dish which he has more or less enjoyed,—tough beef, for instance,—he holds on to his plate when the waiter comes to remove it, and refuses to part with it until he has seen the contents of the next dish. If it is kid—which, you must know, tastes uncommonly like stewed gloves—he tells the waiter to bring him back the last course. If it is degenerate grey mullet—which is not the grey mullet of England, I beg to state—he helps himself liberally on his beefy plate. He has a partiality for grey mullet, and sucks the bones. To excuse himself for his cunning, he invariably tells the amused waiter, who quite well sees through his little plan, that he likes his beef and fish, “ *Tútt’ insiême.*” (If he had parted with his plate the grey mullet would have been a very mutilated one before he saw it again.) There are three uncertain-aged Boston ladies here whom Doris has christened the “ ladies of Cranford ” ; but although she pokes a little harmless fun at them, nothing is prettier than her manner towards them. There cannot be more than eighteen

years between the age of the eldest and that of the youngest, yet Doris says that Miss Rosina always speaks as if her eldest sister was much too old to care about expeditions.

The three sisters have a habit of disagreeing, and contradicting each other's statements. An amusing instance occurred when Miss Rosina told Doris about her mother's death.

"We are orphans now," she said. "Mother died last fall."

Doris asked me afterwards if there was no limit in the *Statesman's Year-book* to the age of orphans. There certainly should be. Aged people may have no parents, but only the young are orphans.

Miss Rosina went on to say that her mother's death was quite beautiful.

Miss Persephine Biggs contradicted her: "Rosina, you shouldn't say that. You suggest that her death was more beautiful than her life. It was just as she would have wished, peaceful and calm; but I think 'beautiful' is scarcely the word to use upon such an occasion—it sounds theatrical."

The second sister broke in:

"I don't see how you think it was just as she would have wished it, Persephine. She died on washing day, in her bonnet, and she was a woman that liked to fix things up to the minute. It must have been very embarrassing to her to die all in a hurry like that."

Miss Rosina, who has a faded romance and smiles accordingly, meekly replied:

"I don't suppose the Lord takes much account of the Biggs' washing-day, anyhow." Here Miss Persephine handed Doris a peppermint. "They are opera peppermints," she said, "and I find them an excellent digestive; the food here is very obstinate."

“ You don’t suppose young folks’ digestion is as cranky as yours. I’m sure that complexion don’t look as if it had ever known any stomach trouble. Peppermints are considered very vulgar in England : isn’t that so ? ” It was Adonaey who spoke, the middle sister ; her name is the female American corruption of Adonais.

Doris confessed that in some English circles peppermints might be considered a little loud, but that here in Sicily, where anything sweet is as precious as pearls, she would love to have one. The peppermints in question were the soft, fat, self-important, presidential peppermints of America.

In spite of all the gentle bickering which goes on between the three old maids, they love each other very dearly in their tender old hearts. They have one and all lost their hearts to Doris. Doris took the eldest sister out for a walk the other day ; a high wind was blowing, the wind which always is blowing here when it is not a sirocco. Well, the frail old lady ventured out, more, I think, for the sake of Doris’ company than anything else.

“ It was so funny to see her popping in and out of the family vaults in the street of tombs. Why do very old people find Greek tombs so interesting, I wonder ? ”

“ Because living humanity has ceased to take much interest in them,” I said. “ Young people find mankind more interesting in the pink living flesh than in the dry bones preserved in these ancient rock tombs.”

“ I fear you will give my classical education up as a bad business,” she said ; “ but I’m really awfully tired of ancient aqueducts and streets of tombs. The ancient Greeks seemed to bury their dead all over the place—whenever they found a convenient rock to hack a hole in, and I believe the

Greeks and Romans always turned their slaves on to aqueducts when there wasn't anything else for them to do."

The German in the mackintosh improves on acquaintance; he lent me Freeman's *Sicily* to-day, which he apparently knows inside out. I am not prepared to follow him in this matter, as I prefer my own Sicily even to Freeman's. Besides, Freeman makes you feel such a fool, which is always an uncomfortable sensation for one of my age. Doris is still the only young thing in the hotel, and we are one and all her willing slaves. The waiters reserve the best cuts off the joint for her, if Sicilian animals have such things. Their anatomy is never divulged by the waiter, whose one idea is to get something on to each plate somehow, as equally apportioned as possible. Even the old general produced a pot of clean, white, lardy-looking honey, which had come all the way from Milan, as a present for Doris.

Yours in haste,

J. C.

VILLA POLITI, SYRACUSE,
February 21st, 1900.

DEAR LOUISE,—

I would amazingly have liked to know and see how London behaved when the news came that Methuen had entered Kimberley without firing a shot, and that the first train ran through from the Cape last night. We drank a bottle of Madame Politi's best Marsala on the strength of it, and the general let himself go on the Indian Mutiny. He was struggling over the announcement of the relief in the Catania paper when Doris came up the front portico steps. He called to her to come and listen.

The old boy read till tears blinded his eyes and his glasses were too dim to see through. Without a word, Doris took the paper gently from his hand and gave it to me, and I took up the good news where he left off. Doris stood with her two hands clasped through the general's arm. Rumanio was listening at a respectful distance. The general beckoned to him.

"Come and hear, Rumanio, come and hear."

"It is also reported," I continued, "*that General Cronje has been taken prisoner with twelve thousand men, but the report is not confirmed at the seat of war.*"

"*Mio Dio*, Rumanio, *Mio Dio*! I wish I could live in England." The words broke from the general's lips like a cry of pent-up years. "It's

better to live but one more year in England in times like these than to drag out ten here."

Rumanio stepped up to him and took his arm.

"I think I'll go to my room," he said. "Thank you, sir, thank you, for reading. My dear," he said, touching Doris' hand gently, "I'm a silly old man, who has outlived his day. If they would only let me die in England instead of existing here all alone!"

I looked at Doris: her eyes were full of tears.

"Dear old general!" she said, when he had left, leaning on Rumanio's arm. "How cruel old age is! In spite of the Hyblæan honey and the sunshine, apparently London is better than Sicily." She turned her eyes to the garden, green and gay, summer reigning over the land while it was still only the second month in the year. "To be a soldier at heart and to have outlived your physical energies must be so humiliating; his heart is just as fresh as ever. Now he is going away upstairs to talk to Rumanio of the old Garibaldian days, or to imagine himself one of the gay crowd in his club in London. Old age is cruel, cruel!"

"Dear child," I said, "don't imagine he feels half as keenly about it as you do. Old age has its blessings. Our senses for sorrow, pain, pleasure are not so poignant; gradually, gradually our pulses weaken and our feelings grow less keen."

"You say *our*," she said, "just as if you were the general's age; he is a very kind old man, while you are——" She paused. "You are——"

"Are what?" I asked. "Just a middling old one?"

"Yes, just half and half," she said, with mischievous eyes. "The half that is old gives you some pleasant privileges, while the half that is

young makes you good company for a girl like me."

"What sort of a girl are you?" I said. "Tell me, what do you imagine you are like?"

"I don't know," she said; "I never thought about anything so silly, but evidently you have, sir."

"Why do you think that?"

"Because you have drawn a me-ish sort of girl in your story. Do you know," she said suddenly, leading our steps towards the bridge in the garden which faces the old monastery, now a poor-house, "I want you, when you come to the part of the story where the old man sees that Phyllis loves the younger one,—I want you to make her fall really in love with the old hero, just because he is willing to give her up. Most women would, you know; they hate being given up too easily."

"But the other is the true version," I said; "our story was one taken from real life."

"Never mind about that," she said "let's make a nice romance of our own. Just make her a grander sort of girl, one who would appreciate the deeper love of an older man."

"Where shall I find my model?" I said. "I don't believe any woman I ever knew would have behaved as you wish this one to."

"I'm certain there are lots. I never liked her. I wish you would change her."

"No," I said, so determinedly that she looked at me in surprise. "No, I am quite satisfied with her. I refuse to change her one bit."

"After all, it is my story," she said, with pretended dignity; "I only asked you to write it."

"I think he was a selfish old fool," I said. "He took advantage of the girl's lonely position. She was almost dependent upon him for society."

Besides, he saved her life upon one occasion, and then proceeded to ruin it by asking her to marry him; it was taking a mean advantage of her youth and gratitude."

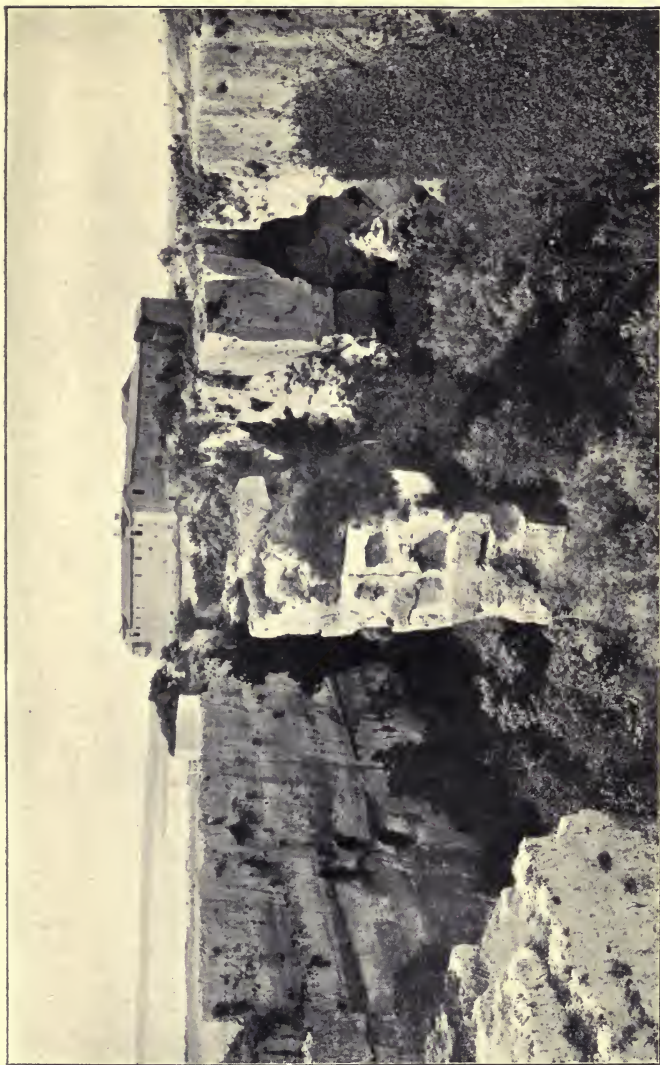
"That's all you know about women and girls," she said. "Let me tell you, sir, the part of you that is young, what the half of you that is old ought to have known already, that a woman never forgives a man for not asking her to marry him when he has deliberately led her to expect it."

"Did his attention lead her to expect it?"

"Haven't you made him seek her society from morning till night? First he appealed to her by teaching her the curious native customs, and explaining their meanings, and educating her generally. There are men who attack a woman's heart through her intellect; he was one of them. I think he showed her very plainly that he cared for her. A man of his age doesn't generally spend his entire time with a young girl unless he cares for her a good deal."

There was an awkward silence between us for a few minutes; I was thinking of many things both wise and foolish.

The old monastery at the end of the garden, built up sheer with chips of the quarries, looked grim and strong in the evening light, a very fortress of Mediæval impregnability. I turned my eyes from the picture of its fallen greatness. Once a fortified monastery, commanding a wide view of the sea from its fine battlements, to-day a wretched shelter for the starving poor of Syracuse. I stole a glance at the girl by my side; it may have been my fancy, or a trick played by the radiance of the setting sun, but I thought I detected a blush lingering there. The next moment I knew I was mistaken, for in the most casual voice in the world, she said:



“ Once a fortified monastery, commanding a wide view of the sea from its fine battlements, to-day a wretched shelter for the starving poor of Syracuse.”
[To face p. 60.]

“ *Albérگو dei Póveri* is a much nicer name than our poor-house. It is not so insulting. Come with me : I want to examine the courtyard. We have gazed with admiring eyes at the building for weeks now, and have never been energetic enough to look at its courtyard.”

“ Cloisters,” I said, correcting her. “ Cloisters, where the monks used to walk and meditate.”

“ I beg their pardons,” she said, “ but somehow in my mind monasteries are connected with soldiers, not monks, and soldiers drill in courtyards, not cloisters.”

As we stood in front of the *Albérگو dei Póveri*, Doris said :

“ This is one of the buildings I like best in all Syracuse. I don’t care what its date is—I’m tired of dates B.C. I like grim, Mediæval A.D. things best. That dear little *lóggia* perched up there in the left-hand top corner ! You can see the blue sky right through its arches ! And that old woman, too, is dignified, sitting there against the grey stone ; even paupers do the right thing in Sicily, they never spoil a picturesque scene. It is strange that such a high building should have no windows except at the top, isn’t it ?”

“ It was a fortified monastery,” I said ; “ that was for safety. That little stone bracket, as you describe it, was a watch-tower ; from that point the soldier-monks could command a view of the whole bay. It was a splendid position.”

“ Poor monks !” said Doris. “ To-day their cloisters are filled with slowly starving poor, while their barbican and watch-towers are used as drying-lines for the State paupers’ rags. Poor proud Sicily ! Poor proud monks ! How has your greatness fallen !”

“ The poverty and philosophy of Sicily are marvellous,” I said. “ They have learnt to do without so much that they expect too little of life. It is their philosophy of doing without which has killed ambition. In England life is scarcely bearable unless a man has a certain amount of bodily comforts, and he has to work to get them. But you do not feel the pangs of hunger so keenly in the sunshine of Sicily. If there is no work for you to do, you sleep in the warm places and forget your troubles. A Sicilian peasant can live like a prince upon what an English workman starves or throws away. I verily believe that what the poor of England waste would support in plenty all the paupers in Italy.”

One pound of goat’s flesh boiled down into soup forms an appetising and pleasant accompaniment to a few *soldis*’ worth of polenta for three days in a Sicilian’s housekeeper’s economy. How far would a pound of beef go in a poor London home? Polenta they despise, and macaroni they never eat. They are conservative in tastes, however socialistic their views in politics may be. Beef is an Englishman’s proper food, without which he must starve, in his own estimation. In many people’s minds I believe this beef-eating quality is considered rather a fine one. The Englishman is a fighting beast—he requires animal meat to support him. It is all very well for the Italians, who live in the sun and play cards, to live on macaroni; but a Briton requires something more. And yet it has been proved that the French, for instance, who eat almost as little meat as the Italians, and are models of domestic economy, find that it is possible to endure the fatigues of long marches without a beef-fed system.

The English newspapers have come very irregularly for the last few days, which is most annoying, for we have never wanted them more. The one paper [*The Standard*] which this hotel supports is worn to a rag before ever I see it.

Yours ever,
J. C.

VILLA POLITI, SYRACUSE,
February, 1900.

MY DEAR LOUISE,—

Thanks for your last letter ; it was satisfying and to the point. We were hungry for a personal description of our national rejoicings over Kimberley. I read your letter to Doris. She has grown to expect that I should share them all with her. Poor child ! her letters are few and far between.

“ Do let us read it together,” she said, “ on the seat sheltered by the lavender-hedge.” When I had finished she sighed :

“ I suppose we can’t have everything, but I’d have loved to see you behaving like a lunatic in London. But then,” she added, “ we shouldn’t be sitting here in this glorious sunshine, watching Madame Politi’s delightfully German sheets drying on the rosemary-bushes.”

We have had to take refuge from the sun under a pink geranium-hedge ! Doris says that she means to write a book called “ Doris and her Sicilian Garden !” “ It won’t be so clever as the ‘ German Garden,’ but the flowers will be much prettier.” “ ‘ Elizabeth ’ has made all England grow rockets and plant rosebeds with pansy carpets. Every one expected great things of these rockets, but they have turned out to be the most wretched frauds, not worth a wild purple scabious or a self-respecting marigold. Elizabeth simply used the word for fun or for effect.”

We have actually done a little more methodical sight-seeing since I last wrote. We visited yesterday the catacombs of San Giovanni, which are not ten minutes' walk from here. Doris says everything is not ten minutes' walk from here when you start out!

There is a small monastery containing monks, not soldiers, attached to the church, which is one of the oldest and most beautiful in Sicily.

We were charmed with the building from the pure beauty of the *ensemble*. The church faces you with surprising elegance as you walk up a straight, white road, white-walled and dusty.

Knowing nothing beforehand of its architectural merits or of its exceedingly ancient foundations, we both loved it from the first moment we saw it. It is one of those objects of beauty which even the ignorant must recognise and admire.

The lower church, which is built in the form of a Greek cross, holds the tomb of St. Marcian, whoever he may be.

Doris says: "When you begin doing early Christian Sicily you feel as hopeless about the minor saints as you do about the Pagan gods in the *Epoca Greca*; you never get away from your ignorance."

She was well pleased that a villainous-looking monk escorted us over the catacombs. He looked as if he had been born and bred there and had never known God's air. He carried a fine swinging iron lamp, which gave forth more smoke than light. The catacombs are very large, and more imposing, I think, than any in Rome. They are cut out of rock, which is rather superior for catacombs, I fancy, and have three stories. I should not have cared to reside in the bottom flats of these mansions; they are much too difficult of access to visit

to-day, and seem to extend an unnecessary way into the bowels of the earth.

Doris, as usual, wanted to know much more than the ignorant monk could tell us. He had only the vaguest knowledge of the place, and did little else than point out "tombs of the noble families."

"I'm tired to death of tombs, especially of noble families; it is tombs, tombs, everywhere. Show me where the people lived when they sought refuge here. Had they no place apart from these awful passages lined with their dead, no rooms of any kind?"

"I don't believe it," she said. "If all these Christians were buried here in the times of the persecution, they couldn't possibly have lived all together in these narrow passages; it wasn't proper for saints and martyrs."

The monk shook his wicked head and blinked an evil eye, then snuffed the candle with his fat fingers. He had lived above the catacombs all his life, he was entrusted to show tourists over them, but he did not consider it necessary to know anything about them. He had never given half an hour's thought to them in his life.

When we were in the crypt of St. Marcian an exquisite chanting suddenly began. Doris left me and hurried up the steps back into the church, which she found completely empty. The monk scuttled after her.

"You have not seen the tomb of St. Marcian, signorina," he said. "The blessed martyr was bound to one of these granite columns, and——"

"*Piano! Piano!*" exclaimed Doris impatiently. "That chanting is lovely. Where is it coming from?"

"It is only the brothers singing," he said. "St. Marcian, in his youth——"

“ *Piano!*” Doris urged. “ Show me where your brothers are singing. I have no use for St. Marcian, but I love music.”

We passed through the empty and deserted church to a little door on the right, which led into a charming monastery garden, full of overgrown flowers. The monk pointed to a tiny chapel almost hidden by the high garden steps and the masses of flowers. He motioned us to enter, himself instantly kneeling down and dropping into prayer. If these monks have nothing to do, they mutter with their red lips unintelligible Latin prayers, with about as much meaning in the action as a goat puts into chewing its cud.

The chapel was a whitewashed building, not much bigger than a cottage room. There were two cheaply draped altars, one with a brightly coloured print of our Saviour hanging over it. The other, and more popular of the two, had a fine wax figure of our Lady on it; these were the only objects in the chapel to relieve its pauper bareness. There were no lights, no flowers, no votive offerings, and no priest or monk officiating at the altars, although the chapel was full of poor worshippers. But I have never heard such a marvellous effect of sound as filled that little church. It came from a chamber overhead where the monks were singing. It was wonderful Latin chanting, full of music and rich in harmony. It was solely vocal. The simple congregation was so interested in Doris, whose pretty hat and dainty dress were affairs of unexpected novelty in their midst, that they made no pretence at praying any more. The women smiled pleasantly at her, while the children stood on the seats open-mouthed in admiration.

It is pleasant to see Doris inspire these gentle people with admiration; she takes their homage

quite naturally and understands them admirably. If they wish to look at her chain, loaded with foolish charms, it gives her great pleasure to show it to them. Their childish curiosity never annoys her.

“ ‘ Let ’em all come,’ ” she said, smiling as they trooped out of the church after her. “ If such little things give them pleasure, surely we can be patient. I can’t understand people resenting the native simplicity and love of beauty in these people. We look at the shop windows in Bond Street ; they look at me. What is the difference ? ”

From the high steps in the garden we saw the monks in their brown frocks standing in the low upper chamber, singing with very wide-open mouths. I was glad to see the ecclesiastical brethren ; those with the clean-shaven patch on their heads of strong hair were undoubtedly men of superior mental calibre to the dirty lay-brother who showed us the catacombs. At the end of the garden there is an outside staircase which leads to a picturesque stone belfry. As we entered the church early in the afternoon an old monk was ascending it. After taking a good look at us, he commenced clapping the bell for service. Church bells in Sicily are not rung, they are beaten on the outside with a stick—which is not musical. The rose window of the church is well worthy of inspection. Doris and I have often admired it from the point where you can see it best—across the orange grove on a far white road ; you are too close standing under it to get its full beauty.

On our way home Doris again remarked upon the total absence in Sicily of rural cottages. The inhabitants, even the small farmers, live in the cities on the plains, or on the tops of the mountains in the ancient hill-towns. You very rarely see a snug little homestead, or, indeed, any form of domestic

building even in the highly cultivated plains. This arises from two causes: first, the fear of malaria attaching to the plain; and, secondly, the ancient custom of herding together in cities for safety from raiding brigands.

“If these two dangers have given us the lovely mountain cities, I can’t be sorry,” Doris said. “I must live in one before I quit Sicily. I think, to look out in the morning and find yourself perched up in a little town flirting with the clouds, would be perfect. Besides, if the people lived scattered about the country on their farms or in small villages we shouldn’t see them in their great blue-hooded cloaks, riding on their black donkeys up to their hill-cities every evening, should we? There would be fewer fifteenth-century pictures in the landscape for us to gush and ‘Oh!’ over. Fancy all this lovely country, sacred every inch of it, spoilt by an ugly nineteenth-century prosaic people, instead of the dear delightful creatures who aren’t the least aware that whatever they do or *don’t* do is a pleasure for an artist to look at, except when they have a little money and buy a hat in Catania; then they are perfectly certain to be quite wrong!”

While the men are busy working in the fields the donkey lies down with the dog and helps to guard the wine gourd and the scanty food. For even a donkey in Sicily can’t expect to eat thistles all day long, he, too, must “do without.” The men, as well as the women, I notice, prefer riding sideways on their beasts, all of which, of course, have no saddles; perhaps that is the reason. The young boys sit right out on the stern of the animal, after the fashion of the human boy at Happy Margate. Every country grows the same sort of boys, I fancy; only here in Sicily they are beautiful as well as human.

The sirocco is clearing ; to-morrow we may see Etna. It has almost become a phantom mountain to us ; we do not believe it really exists, or that it can be seen from Syracuse. But Madame Politi says that it will soon seem so near that we shall want to climb it every morning before breakfast.

I must thank you for reminding me of Lang's *Theocritus*. Theocritus is supposed to have had a garden in the *latomia* under the hotel. It is the coolest place in Syracuse during the summer heats, so Doris will enjoy it immensely. Will you ask your London bookseller to post it me here? Syracuse does not support a regular bookshop. When I reach Palermo I will send you a case of Ingham & Whitaker's best " Marsala " ; a fair exchange, I think.

Yours
J. C.

VILLA POLITI, NEAR SYRACUSE.

MY DEAR LOUISE,—

A terrible storm of wind and rain has kept us prisoners in the hotel to-day, with the result that I have heard a good deal of gossip one way and another.

You will remember my mentioning the three ladies of Cranford? Doris told me that Miss Persephine confided in her to-day that they had come to Sicily on account of her youngest sister's health.

"Is she an invalid?" Doris asked. "I hope I have not tired her when I have taken her out with me. I am a good walker."

"She is gradually recovering from a great shock."

"Your mother's sudden death, I suppose?"

"Oh no, my dear—we all accepted that as God's will; we have learnt to say, 'Thy will be done.' It was a much more cruel blow. None of us approved of the affair from the very first. He treated our poor darling shamefully. My father would never let us see anything of men afterwards."

"Then it happened when your father was alive?" Doris said, remembering how they had mentioned once that their father had been dead almost twenty years.

"Yes, it almost killed him, my dear, the slight put upon his favourite child. Two weeks before the marriage a girl who was to have been one of Rosina's bridesmaids, a pretty child of eighteen, whom Rosina loved very dearly, came to pay us a

visit. She had only been our guest ten days when she eloped with Rosina's lover. The cake was ordered, my dear, and I had twice been fitted for my bridesmaid's suit. We had to pay for everything."

"Poor Miss Rosina!" Doris said. "And although this happened eighteen years ago, she has not got over it yet, poor heart."

"It may seem a very long time to you, my dear," Miss Persephine replied hotly, "but I assure you my sister's pain and humiliation are just as keen as ever. We do all we can to make her forget him."

"Perhaps she does not want to forget him: women often prefer nursing a dead passion to living without one entirely."

Miss Persephine sighed.

"There's a good deal of truth in that. And it is hard to believe that all men are bad, my dear; for surely the Lord would have known and made some suitable substitutes for good women."

"There are curates," Doris said.

"In the States we don't reckon them as you do in England, my child."

"Isn't this pathetic? These women's hearts are terrible things to interfere with. Men break them and mend them, but never understand them."

Doris says that Miss Rosina has merely eaten and slept and lived under protest for almost twenty years. She has lived because physically she can't die. There is something very frail and feminine about her appearance. And really, compared with the Germans and her sisters, she manages to convey a certain impression of youth—until Doris sits down beside her. But Doris, with her April freshness of limb and elastic pose, makes the contrast cruel.

If age is pathetic sometimes, I think so is youth, in its sublime ignorance of its power.

Miss Rosina's hands, so finely lined, look like bird's claws in the girl's slim, firm, pink-tipped fingers. It was unkind to look at the two hands clasped together.

But, to continue my gossip, this evening, when the two elder sisters were sleeping after dinner, Miss Rosina found her way to Doris's room and showed her, very shyly, a painted miniature of the man who had broken her heart—the miniature of the man who had filled her life with an undying romance.

“You must promise not to tell my sister,” she said anxiously, as she unwrapped the picture from its soft silk covering.

“But do you mean to say that neither of them knows you have his portrait?”

“No, oh no,” she said, blushing like a girl; “I have kept it hidden away all these years. They are so hard on him, my dear, and I, for their sakes, have to pretend that I hate his very name. But when I am alone with him,” and she touched the picture lovingly, “I can live again in the old days; he is then to me the man I loved and trusted, the man I never doubted.”

“Dear Miss Rosina!” Doris said. “I could never love like that.”

“Dear heart! Every moment of the day except those which I can steal alone with him is a weariness and an effort. I try to take an interest in things, indeed I do, but the whole world is empty. I thought perhaps if I got stronger I might forget. But I can't—I never shall; he is with me every day.”

“Forget!” Doris cried to me. “Fancy having kept her youthful love warm and tender for almost

twenty years! Fancy any one loving and feeling like that! And I dared to laugh at her. How hard women can be, even nice ones, like me! I used to say that the undamaged parts of the whole three wouldn't make one healthy woman. I hate myself for saying such things, but sometimes I can't help it; they just come."

There was this excuse, that one of the three is lame, another blind in one eye, and the youngest is generally shattered.

"And the sentiment of Miss Rosina's dress," Doris continued, "isn't it touching? The short bodices and the flower-sprigged skirts which *he* used to like, no doubt. Quite ladylike and unobtrusive, but so youthful and so remembering."

I'm afraid that you will say that this is a short letter all about nothing, yet it is merely a part of our life here. For even the garden and the lavender walk are subtly connected in our minds with the figures of the three sisters. And the garden is so much a part of our daily life, that if you are to understand the one you must be introduced to the others. I have noticed that Herr Mackintosh has accompanied the sisters more than once in their walks farther than the lavender groves. Miss Adonaey is very interested in tracing out the boundaries of the five divisions of Syracuse. Achradina spreads itself out to the right of our garden, where the sun sets, and where the goats make music with their hundred bells all day long. Epipolae is a desert of rocks, full of the remains of ancient Greek houses, and lies directly behind our house. Doris and I have made many pleasant excursions to Epipolae in search of the short blue iris which seems to delight in seeking soil for its roots in the crevices of the white rocks. It flourishes best in mid-February. While we have

been seeking for this brightest of blue flowers, we have stumbled against many scores of rock foundations of houses, and, not very intelligently, I'm afraid, we have tried to trace out their ground plans. The front entrance is always very clear, also the dimensions of the building, but little else. Never in any case have we found a house with one stone upon the top of another. No walls of the rudest kind are left standing. Ortygia is a beautiful rock-girt island, and, I believe, is the most ancient settlement of the five cities. Ortygia was the original Syracuse out of which the others sprang. Neapolis and Tyche I feel rather vague about, although I have heard Miss Adonaey and Herr Mackintosh laying down their plans to their own entire satisfaction.

Herr Mackintosh has a German admiration for Miss Adonaey's intelligence, but the man in him hankers after Miss Rosina.

Modern Syracuse—modern in the comparative sense of the word—lies, I think I have said, on the island of Ortygia, which is connected by draw-bridges with the ancient *rotóndo* on the borders of Achradina. This is highly satisfactory to the two eldest American sisters, who are as keen after ancient remains as a dachshund after truffles.

Yours affectionately,
J. C.

VILLA POLITI,
February, 1900.

DEAR LOUISE,—

Heaven grant it is true that the Catania paper reports that Ladysmith is relieved. I can scarcely believe it is correct. It is the way with Italian journalists to make the tide of victory run strong on either side. A few weeks ago the Boers were driving us into the sea; to-day, because Kimberley is relieved, and we have had—thank God!—some few important victories, they are confident that Ladysmith is relieved, and that Cronje has completely surrendered. I am afraid it is all too good to be true. The Germans still keep Süd Africa tabooed, and smile with all the superiority of the Fatherland at our successes. The clever German woman who told such good stories has gone; we miss her very much. I wish you could have known her. She was as like a cook as any real princess, and as amusing as *Dr. Johnson's Table-talk*.

Doris was vastly excited to-day, and dragged me off from my writing to see how our excavations were proceeding in the field where the oxen were ploughing. Alas! the gentle oxen will never again tread that sea-girt field, for the excavators have laid bare a vast area of tombs.

“I thought you were tired of ancient tombs,” I said.

“Oh, it's different when they are your own tombs,” she answered laughingly. “Besides,

look what the men have given me—three lovely coins and a terra-cotta lamp! No one can say that these antiques were made in Birmingham, buried in Syracuse, and dug up by an American tourist. They have been buried all these centuries and centuries! My hands are the next to touch this little lamp since some Greek girl used it, and had it buried with her, as a sort of night-light, I suppose. The moment is sacred when you and I only look for the first time upon things which have been hidden all these centuries from the world. Things grow vulgarised under the eyes of tourists in museums.”

By the time we arrived on the scene of action, Signor Orsi, the director of the Syracuse Museum, was there in person, supervising the excavation.

Doris pocketed her coins and concealed her lamp under a bushel; she had no mind to get the workman into trouble. But it was quite unnecessary, for one of the men immediately went up to Signor Orsi and told him that the English lady, who had come on the forbidden ground, would like to know the correct date of the coins that she had just picked up, if he would kindly tell her.

One proved to be about the third century B.C., the time of the thirty tyrants, and the other Signor Orsi assigned to the Byzantine epoch. Signor Orsi wasn't in the least annoyed at the men for having sold the coins, although it is strictly forbidden. Many things are strictly forbidden in Sicily, but few things are strictly punished. They were not coins which the Museum wanted.

Signor Orsi is a mighty fine-looking fellow, and was most correctly and suitably dressed for his interesting occupation. In my own mind, I fancy he greatly preferred escorting this smiling English girl, whose eyes responded eagerly to his words of

wisdom, over the excavations, to his famous guest of yesterday, no less a personage than Sir Marquess Wise, trustee of the British Museum and lots of other things besides. Although I'll be bound that Doris has none but the vaguest idea of what post a tyrant held in the third century B.C. A tyrant means a bully to her, in ancient or modern history, and perhaps, after all, she is not so very far amiss.

Signor Orsi must have thought, judging from her modern appearance, that she was scarcely a likely subject to take an intelligent interest in what she was at the moment examining; but he seemed to enjoy her unintelligent interest amazingly. He spoke English.

Doris was very vexed, and told him so, that the tombs cannot honestly be ascribed to an earlier date than late Christian.

“ I prefer the oxen ploughing in the field; I do despise anything later than ‘ Pagan ’ in tombs. I'd almost as soon have the Brompton Cemetery.”

Some of the tombs were quite amusing, all the same. They were cut out of the rock, of course; for fields in Syracuse consist of rock, with a surface of light soil like a top-dressing, except in the volcanic districts. There the earth is as dark and as rich as velvet, a beautiful contrast to the grey-green of the olive-trees growing on it. These tombs looked snug and sensible. In one cave or vault there were six rock coffins lying side by side, which resembled nothing so much as a pound of fat sausages laid in a row; this was a family vault. One fine tomb had an inscription over it to the “ Eorene Nymph.”

This of course had a human interest attached to it for Doris, and therefore brought forth many

questions which I felt glad the learned signor was asked to answer and not myself.

What strange things women are for leaving the main facts and wandering off into abstract questions : they can't be satisfied with tombs, they must have the spirits which haunt them !

In Sicily prickly pears (*Fichi d'India*), as the natives call them, (the English jobbing-gardener designates them cacti of sorts) are to the walls what glass is in England.

Indeed, I would sooner rob an orchard by climbing over a glass-topped wall than one protected by prickly pears. The sharp hairs, which cover the big, succulent plant-shaped leaves of the plant, are very poisonous. In Sicily the thief would in all probability carry a fine pair of tweezers in his pocket to draw out the thorns with if he attempted to scale the wall. These thorns, when once they have worked into the flesh, create blood-poisoning.

"What magnificent cover they would make for fighting behind !" Doris said ; "nothing could find its way through these awful leaves."

Prickly pears, which greet you everywhere in Sicily, are, as one of the American sisters said, "The Wicked Animals of Vegetation." They came from America.

Doris says stones in Sicily are like flowers, and so they are, for the warm hues they take lend plenty of colour to the landscape.

"And they grow like weeds," she said, looking over the great stretch of rock-strewn *Achradina*. "I believe if a thousand men worked for a thousand days removing the stones from the fields in Sicily, the stones would grow up more quickly than the men could cart them away."

It is surprising to see the fine green blades of corn and wheat springing up between the rocks. I for-

get what happened to the wheat which was sown upon stony ground, but evidently the Sicilians don't believe it, and have proved the parable wrong, for everywhere there is green wheat and grey stones.

Some of the ancient olive-trees growing out of these rocky fields look the very embodiment of time. Their appearance is prehistoric compared with other trees which never turn grey. The landscape sometimes seems to me strikingly like a fine silver-point drawing.

The gigantic boulders of limestone and the gnarled grey trunks of these monarch trees are so much alike in tone that it is almost possible to believe that the trees themselves were hewn by the Greeks out of the rocks. They are not like our trees; they are totally un-British.

But these grey scenes are not for all time; often the landscape in Sicily is a riot of colour, as, for instance, when the daring pig's-face is in bloom, *Barba di Giove*, as the Sicilians call this ostentatiously vulgar flower, which hangs like a curtain from villa walls and railway banks.

I have given Doris Lang's *Theocritus* to read, and every moment she begs my pardon and interrupts my writing. It is, "Tell me this," or "Explain that." She remarked that the landscape must have changed since Theocritus's day, like the climate of England since the time of paint and feathers. For where to-day are the fresh green pastoral scenes Theocritus loved to linger over? Why does he so often mention kine and calves? To-day it is goats and kids. Where is the grass to feed the kine? Goats can live on herbs alone, and on every scrap that proceedeth out of the ash-barrels of the poor, but cows must have grass or turnips. The one cow of Achradina looks as if it had lived on wild sage, and had never known the

succulent juice of turnips; but the people are strangely proud of the honour of possessing it, all the same, and the watch-dog treats it with silent respect.

I thought pink champions might be good to eat; they look as tempting to the human eye as English buttercups and are far more numerous here, so I watched that lonely cow of Achradina. It brushed the delicate pink petals with its warm breath while it kept an eager watchful eye on the few blades of grass which were growing close to where I was sitting. I wanted to tell that cow all about the one horse in Venice, just to let it know that other animals have their trials too, but I remembered that it was a Sicilian cow, and therefore a philosopher. In youth it had learnt to "do without."

This is how Doris runs on, and then expects me to get on with my writing. I have stuck to my story, but it is no pleasant work letting the old hero see what a fool he has made of himself; that sort of thing strikes nearer home than one fancies sometimes.

It is strange how we can look at old age and at death as grim evils that come to others and that we evade. Death is a natural circumstance when it does not threaten me or those near to me.

Do you know the carob-tree by sight? It supplies Sicily with the long brown beans which Doris and I have so often discussed, as to where they grew. They are the size of a good broad bean, but with a pod as strong and polished as old mahogany. The tree they grow on is a magnificent evergreen, with fine glossy leaves. They are very plentiful, these carob-beans, and are for sale here in all the country shops "where fodder for beasts sells itself."

I fancy this particular fodder, however, in times of need "sells itself also for men." Broad-beans, carob-beans, polenta, and fennel are, I think, the cheapest popular articles of food in Sicily; macaroni only comes into the domestic economy of those who are a little removed from actual poverty.

When Doris complained about a horse which was vainly trying to drag our insecurely patched cab along a rough road the other day, the driver, who is a good fellow and honest, shrugged his shoulders, and remarked :

"When I am hungry, signorina, of course my beast is hungry. When I have something to eat, it has something; but my children must come first."

There was a little pause, for the argument seemed final, and so far as his children were concerned we knew he was speaking the truth, for Sicilian gentleness to children and their kindness to those poorer than themselves are beyond the denial of their enemies.

"Is that not just, signorina?" he said. "If I had always plenty of food, my beast would have plenty. He keeps me and my family; I have no desire to kill him."

"Let me buy his horse some food," Doris said, "or else have the poor thing shot, and get him a new one; we come to Sicily and enjoy ourselves and do nothing for the people."

"My dear little one," I said, "a kind impulse is good, but not always wise. You could not support all the poor in Syracuse. If you bought this man a new horse, you would have every diseased horse in Sicily brought up to the hotel in cabs to-morrow morning. An Englishwoman, as kind-hearted as yourself, and as anxious to do something for the wretched cab-horses, began

buying up all the old horses which were past work, and giving a little extra money to the owner to purchase a good one. The number of scabbed, miserable beasts increased in Palermo at an astounding rate. The unsuspecting lady was at last informed by a knowing Italian that an enormous trade in diseased and lame horses had started between Sicily and the mainland since she had begun buying the disabled beasts for charity. Believe me, the only way to do any good is to pay the cabman an honest fare—not an exorbitant one, for what the Sicilian makes too easily he gambles away, and a good deal else besides—and always stoutly refuse to get into a cab if the horse has a sore or is past work. It will be the survival of the fittest cabby, of course, which, although seemingly cruel, is the only remedy. If a cabman cannot afford to hire a good sound horse from the cab-owner, then he must take to begging, or even worse; any profession will be better than driving a miserable horse, harnessed by a rope to a disreputable cab.”

“At least I may buy this one horse a bunch of fresh carrots? Oh, think,” she said,—“think of the horses in England that get their lumps of sugar and two fresh carrots every Sunday when their masters visit the stable, and their fresh bedding, and—and unsalted hay, and old grain every day! This poor beast has never seen a bed of dry straw, or licked a lump of sugar from a loving hand since it was foaled.”

We purchased some carrots, and for the rest of the way, as we drove along the narrow road with white plastered walls topped with golden oranges and green leaves, the happy cabman and the surprised horse devoured the juicy carrots with fine faultless teeth.

“ Listen !” Doris said ; “ he crunches them as eagerly as his horse.”

“ Hunger makes primitive men of even poets,” I said, “ let alone cabmen. At the present moment he is not far removed from the level of his beast ; hunger dominates them both.”

“ I wonder,” she said, “ if real hunger would give Miss Rosina a healthy appetite? Perhaps at Ladysmith even stewed kid might have had a relish.”

Miss Rosina has become conscious of the German’s attention to her, and is very much perturbed. He has got so far as to look after her comfort at table, and this for a German is saying a good deal. For they eat in the same methodical, unemotional manner as they study. Nothing diverts their attention from the main idea. A German stomach is capable of holding as much as a German brain, without becoming disturbed or giving in.

Every day Theocritus’s garden becomes more wonderful ; but I must refrain, or you will complain that my letter, as usual, is very disconnected. But then, am I not writing about Sicily? and nothing in Sicily is connected, nothing is methodical. It is a land where even Nature is surprised at herself, and the big people have the simplicity of little children. If my letters were to express my every-day life here, they would be a stranger mixture still of sunshine and flowers and antique remains, and the unending study of the beauties and horrors of poverty. The evenings are warm enough now for glowworms, which shine in the narrow paths, where the tall blue lavender and the pink rose-hedges wind, like stars dropped down from the sweet southern night to taste the fragrance of the flowers.

Name me any old homely English flowers—love in a mist, eye-bright, traveller's-joy, lad's-love, or any you will—and Doris will send you a piece from this garden, and they grow, mind you, hobnobbing with semi-tropical plants—the wild short palm, for instance, which serves the Sicilian housewife for her kitchen brooms, or the trailing caper plant, or a near relation of our simple English comfrey, that almost takes upon itself the airs of an orchid, so brilliant is its colour and glorified its blossom. Before the hour for the glowworms, when the evening primroses and other flowers are opening their eyes, hundreds of chattering jackdaws return to their homes in the white cliffs.

Doris and her Sicilian garden make my life here a thing which I thought could not have come to any man outside Heaven. No, the snake has not appeared in it yet; when it does I will not put the blame on the woman.

Yours,
J. C.

VILLA POLITI, SYRACUSE,

February, 1900.

DEAR LOUISE,—

Etna has appeared at last; she has shaken off her megrims, and now stands out like a débutante in her first evening dress, waiting to be admired. And we do admire her, and esteem her, and venerate her, as all Sicily does. Her fairness is bewildering, her contour the most enchanting, and she has it all her own way too, for there is no other snow-crowned height near. Etna rises alone from the plains. The famous Hyblæan Hills—which are only hills, not imperial mountains—are in the far distance, whereas Etna is always near, whatever her distance may be. Etna mothers the Sicilian landscape as a minister does a city. Doris has insisted upon having an Etna festival, to commemorate our first view of the most important thing in Sicily. We are to do nothing else but worship at the shrine of this queen of snow mountains. This phantom, opalescent vision, which floats somewhere betwixt blue heaven and earth, is a thing so unreal in its delicate beauty that it seems as if no tired feet had ever trodden its glittering heights. As you watch it growing in beauty and mystery with every change of light, it seems as if you could float through it with the clouds, like a bird; it is too spiritual to be solid.

An American lady, who has “done” Syracuse in a day, described Mother Etna as “cunning.”

“Why,” she said, comparing the delicate pink flush on the snow with the human flesh, “it’s mighty like a fine American woman’s pair of rounded shoulders slipping out of an evening bodice made of gauze!”

The clouds which float round the mountain are the gauze, you must know, and although the simile is an extraordinary one, it is uncommonly clever when you see the reality. Etna has the impudence and self-assurance of the Anglo-Saxon woman, who has gone one better than being born English. For what woman living would not say, “If I am to be born again, let me be born an American”?

Herr Mackintosh has been up to the flat roof of the hotel every morning for the last week to catch a glimpse of Etna by sunrise. She is reported to be almost clear of clouds at that uncomfortable hour; but, as usual, the freakish beauty has disappointed him.

We paid a short visit to the field of tombs to-day, and as we were wandering over it at some distance from the excavations, we came across a fresh discovery and a most unexpected sight, and this last is also within a stone’s-throw of our garden. We idly followed a little goat-track cut out of the rock, which eventually led us down by a flight of stone steps to the lower level of the field. When we had picked our way down the primitive staircase, we were suddenly confronted by a large family, living in an immense ancient cave-tomb. We could not believe at first that the group of people busy about the entrance of the tomb actually slept and lived in it, until one pleasant-faced woman, who was nursing a fine specimen of a tomb-reared child, invited us to enter.

The tomb, as Doris said, had evidently once belonged to a “noble family,” for it extended for a

considerable distance back into the rock, and was divided into two portions. On the rough rock-wall, hanging over a primitive bed which consisted of planks, laid on the shelves which had in past centuries been reserved for the ashes of the great departed, and covered with two natural goat-skins, was a brightly coloured print of Our Lady. A night-light in a glass dish was feebly burning below it, and a wreath of pink cotton roses, sadly faded, surrounded the dear picture. This was the one elevating, tender touch in that poorest of homes.

Yes, even in their miserable poverty they had spared sous enough to keep bright the memory of that *Mother who gave her only Son* to save all those who are "weary and heavy-laden." Two wooden benches formed the entire furniture of the house.

"That little light in the darkness," Doris said, "I shall never forget it, nor will Our Lady, I am sure. Its light will travel farther than the fine wax candles in the cathedral."

Our hostess, I can assure you, had the dignity and graciousness of a housewife who had little to blush for. It was her home, and she lent it a homely dignity and grace.

We paid a visit to her larder, which consisted of the smaller portion of the noble tomb. It was, as you can imagine, a fine cool place wherein to set cheeses.

The cheeses, it is needless to say, were made of goat's milk, and very fresh and tempting they looked, laid out in their baskets of fresh green rush in all the various stages of maturing, balanced on end or on side according to their age.

"Do you live in the Villa Politi?" the woman asked. "Madame Politi is a very good customer of mine," she added; "I sell her all my best cheeses."



“ One old woman, with her head encased in a fine yellow 'kerchief.' ”
[To face p. 88.]

“Just fancy,” Doris said: “we actually have been eating cheese made in ancient Greek tombs not a quarter of a mile from our very door. What will we find out next? I told you everything in Sicily was classical, but the Hyblæan honey and the tomb cheeses are the limit.”

“Perhaps the food generally would be better if it were more modern,” I said, “although it might not be so picturesque.”

One old woman, with her head encased in a fine yellow kerchief, was seated on the floor watching a cauldron of boiling milk, which was hanging from a hook fastened in the rock-roof over some charcoal ashes; while a small boy, with a perfect profile and imperfect goatskin trousers, was fanning the embers with a wild-palm leaf.

The moment the old crone spied us she left the pot and tottered to Doris’s side, and with trembling hands and eager eyes examined all the girl’s finery—first her bangles, then her rings, and last of all the elegant beaded slippers which, I must confess, were ill suited to the rough ground. The hostess quietly apologised.

“Would the signorina please excuse her grandmother? she was very old, she was a child again.”

“Of course,” Doris said; “I am so glad the trinkets please her. We wear these things to be admired, you know, so it is quite right.” Some coppers were slipped into the old hand, and a franc was presented to the baby; then we left, with an invitation from our charming hostess to come as often as we liked; “our visit had been kind and beautiful.”

“Could Theocritus have beaten this?” Doris said. “Look at the poor young kids hanging outside on the wall of the tomb, waiting to be skinned and eaten! What a picture of sacrificial innocence

they look! And there is the cool green fennel just dug out of the patch of precious soil, which has to grow so many crops in one year."

It is a comfort to think that in a climate like this the family need only sleep in the tomb. They can sing and gamble and half starve in the sun. "And wine is a beggar's drink in Sicily."

Goats make Sicily, and Sicily makes goats. Like all wicked things, they can thrive on very little, and pick up a precarious living somehow. Goats are the Chinese of the animal world. I can almost imagine them playing fan-tan and enjoying opium.

But this little home, mind you, Louise, does not represent real poverty, not as Sicily knows it, not as you can see it in the cities.

In Syracuse, the other day, we met a man with a long narrow cart filled with slender casks.

"Those don't look like wine barrels," Doris said; "let's ask the man what they contain."

"Signorina, they are full of water, not wine."

"What are they for?"

"To supply the poor houses."

"Have they no water in their houses at all?"

"Very few of the houses have cisterns. I am employed to go to the city cistern and fill these barrels with water. Each house is allowed one barrel of water a day, for which they pay one *soldo*."

"When shall we come to an end of what Sicily does without?" Doris said to me. "That is the reason, I suppose, why the women carry out their own and other people's household washing to the roadside stream which we pass every day. Have you noticed that the flow of water in it is much greater in the forenoon, and that all the washing is done early in the day? Is it nature or the ingenious Sicilian who adjusts the supply to the demand?"

“ I fancy it is an aqueduct,” I said, “ although it looks like a country stream ; water is too precious in Sicily to be allowed to be quite natural.”

It is a fine sight to see these sunburnt women, standing knee-deep, washing their clothes in the narrow stream which flows even with the road, or kneeling by the side of it, beating their poor fragments, so rich in colour, against the limestone.

It is always washing-day in Sicily, and the whole city washes by this stream. Wizen old women, bright young girls, with carefully dressed heads held so haughtily, and young mothers, all chatter and wash and wring and souse, while the warm sun shines down upon them, and gives their skin a deeper tint and their laughter a fuller note. A hedge of prickly-pear behind them forms a fine drying-line. Sometimes you see a handsome knitted quilt spread on the hedge, the envy of every housewife, or a richly embroidered skirt ; but as a rule the things washed are too poor to be worth stealing.

Soon after midday every stitch is dry, and you will see the same bevy of women walking across the ancient *rotóndo* back to the city, carrying their clothes, sun-dried and river-washed, balanced lightly on their heads.

Some of the bundles are of enormous size, but nothing is heavy enough to silence the busy tongue of a Sicilian woman. So you see again this charming simplicity is the outcome of dire necessity, for if your Syracusan housewife had water in her house, and money to buy coals, she would not bother to carry her household washing all the way out to this country stream.

It is so often from necessity, and not from choice, that Sicilian habits are picturesque and healthy.

These women live in the basements of decayed

palaces ; picturesque, with ancient coats of arms, and high Gothic windows, which look down grimly upon the humble dwellers in the basements. It is only when you pass under the ancient and outer doorway of one of these palaces, and enter the spacious courtyard, that you realise their size and ancient splendour, their magnificent columns, fine windows, and sun galleries. These palaces were built in the days when a man fortified his home, and knew that it was safer to keep his windows well above the reach of men. The absence of low windows gives a prison-like appearance to the street front of the finest palaces.

Romance dies hard, Louise, even with nineteenth-century tourists. Doris told me to-day of a little incident relating to the German which will amuse you.

As I told you, Herr Mackintosh has been accompanying the three sisters round ancient Syracuse. On leaving her room this morning, Doris met the head-waiter carrying up the stairs a flat rush-basket full of violets. " Beautiful pale mauve double ones," she said. " Of course I thought they were for me ; it made me feel quite frivolous again. I stopped the man."

" " No, no, signorina," he said, ' they are not for you ; the Signor Tedesco has sent them to the Signorina Americana.'

" I looked so surprised and disappointed that the waiter felt sorry. Sicilians are sympathetic, even the waiters.

" " Perhaps the Signore Inglese thinks you do not care for flowers, signorina.' "

" How foolish of me !" I said ; " I never thought that you would care to have any, there are so many growing wild in the *latomia*."

" It was the thought," she said, with a pro-

voking blush, "the pretty attention. *They* do not grow wild in the *latomia*. Don't you know that we women love to be made a lot of, to be fussed over, and thought about? We'd exchange, any one of us, a worthy man for the villain who remembered to bring us home a box of chocolate!

"Besides," she said, "the violets the German sent Miss Rosina were pale mauve violets, very, very double, and very, very sweet." She sighed. "How I should have liked to see Miss Rosina receive them!"

"You shall have some of the same, just as mauve and just as sweet," I said. "I will go into the city this afternoon, and I will wire to Milan, if necessary, for even the violets come from Milan, I suppose."

She shook her head.

"Please don't trouble; it is very kind of you, but a little dull. There isn't the same excitement about an attention you have suggested yourself, especially if the idea was made in Germany. And it won't alter the fact that Miss Rosina has inspired her—her lover with a sentiment which I have failed to arouse in you."

This evening, Miss Rosina, looking younger and brighter than we have yet seen her, adorned herself with the violets of Signor Tedesco, which accorded well with the delicate grey of her gown. Miss Rosina is always compelled to drive with her back to the sun, and a thin brown gossamer protects her fine American skin from the wind. In the kindlier light of the lamp she looked a fragile, dainty figure. The German is teaching her some new games of patience, so we look for them now in the evening to be seated at a little table in the window of the *salon de lecture*—Miss Rosina blushing, and timidly apologetic for her stupidity, the German, half

schoolmaster, half gallant, and very moist, while Miss Persephine blinks with her one business eye from a distant part of the room, eyeing her darling with growing pleasure.

Even before your last letter came to hand our hopes of the relief of Ladysmith were dashed. However, as you say that you are steeped both in war-gloom and snow in London, I am to refrain from discoursing on unpleasant topics and transplant you to Sicily. Doris sends her kind regards.

I am your affectionate brother,

J. C.

VILLA POLITI, SYRACUSE,
February, 1900.

DEAR LOUISE,—

It seems as if Etna had been with us always ; I cannot now imagine the landscape without the presence of the most characteristic thing in it.

Since the sirocco has gone the clearness of the atmosphere is amazing. If you were to sit down and paint Syracuse as it is to-day, all Sicily would crowd and tumble itself on to your canvas ; your foreground would be driven out.

As our cabman said to-day, when we were driving along the road which lies behind the ancient fortress of Euryalus :

“ Etna goes with us all the way, she is only about a kilometre and a half away.” (Her distance from Syracuse is about fifty miles.)

Doris, who has been deep in Marcellus for the last few days (he is her latest local hero), was bent upon trying to follow up his footsteps. From this road you get an excellent view of his camp, which lies below the heights of the Greek fortress of Euryalus.

We had hoped to cross over to the Thapsus, but the narrow passage which connects the island with the mainland is much farther than this clear atmosphere, which foreshortens everything, would have you believe. And distance is always to a Sicilian cabman what his customers wish it to be ; he is too polite or too wise to contradict in a matter

of this kind. If you wish it to be ten miles, it is ten miles, or five should you prefer it.

A carriage-drive along this road is certainly one of the most enjoyable excursions in the neighbourhood. On your right is the bluest of blue seas, with snow-covered Etna floating in the horizon. In the foreground lies Thapsus, always near, yet never within driving distance; while on your right towers the fortress of Euryalus, one of the most impressive monuments of the Greeks, looking down upon Marcellus's camp and Epipolæ. A short distance farther and you come to the "Scala Greca," the most picturesque object in this wonderful group of antiquities.

The ancient Greek stair, like everything else that is Greek, is hewn out of the hillside, which, of course, is composed of rock. The wide steps—so beautifully proportioned—are shaded here and there by olive-trees which look as old as eternity, or as our poor conception of it. The stair is quite perfect in some parts, and can easily be followed from the sea up to the fortress. It is a long, stiff climb, but every step is worth the effort.

While you are driving along this sea-road, the blue Hyblæan hills are always before you in the distance. But in this clear weather nothing is distant; there is absolutely no atmosphere. The artist is brave who paints Sicily under such an aspect. It made Miss Persephine tell us a story:

An Englishman in Calgary, Alberta, was standing on the doorstep of his hotel one morning. The atmosphere, which is as clear there as it is here, brought a mountain in the distance right up to the front door. The tenderfoot turned to the landlord and told him that he was going to climb the mountain before lunch. It looked so inviting.

“That’s right, sonny,” the man said, laughing; “mind you don’t keep the bacon and beans waiting.”

Late afternoon came and the Englishman did not return. A search-party was sent in quest of him. After riding many miles they at last saw the unhappy man standing by the edge of a narrow stream, a mere ditch. He was naked, and his clothes were tied round his neck with a string.

Going cautiously up to him, the men asked him the reason of his extraordinary behaviour. They were afraid between themselves that the strange desolation of the country had affected his brain. The Englishman turned to them, however, and answered in the calmest tone of voice :

“I mean to swim that stream, gentlemen, in case it plays me the same trick as the mountain has done. I started out early this morning to reach the top of it and be home again before lunch. The mountain is just as far off now as it was when I left the inn. So I’m prepared to swim, in case that stream plays me the same abominable trick.”

She also told us the following fact, which, I believe, is perfectly true. It should be a warning to lovers not to visit Canada in the cold season. In some parts the air is so charged with electricity in the winter that kissing is quite painful. Miss Persephine said she knew a young mother who refrained from kissing her children for more than a month for this very reason. The concussion of their lips caused sparks, which could be plainly seen. She said that as a child she had often amused herself by lighting the gas from her finger-tips, after having held hands with her little sister and shuffled her feet along the floor.

It is marvellous how rapidly the god of Spring

does his work in a land like this. Already the green almonds are well formed on the trees, and the short blue iris and the asphodels are over; the late spring flowers now take their place in our daily lives. Doris found a piece of wild laburnum growing out of the stones of the fortress of Euryalus the other day; this we considered a rather superior find.

The little rock-daisy covers the country for miles around. It is so white and grows so close to the ground that it seems like a light fall of snow. We cannot even yet work up any enthusiasm for the "pig's-face," which becomes more and more uncontrolled in its luxuriance every day. There is nothing this most vulgar flower will not cover with its artificial-looking magenta blossoms.

Doris says it is a kitchen Christmas-tree flower, and that she would do better herself with a pair of scissors and a sheet of magenta paper in five minutes.

However, there is more in pig's face, or *Barba di Giove*, than meets the tourist's eye, for the curious leaves of the plant, which hang like fat green fingers over the walls, are as succulent and refreshing as the leaves of the prickly pear. These two plants serve the beasts of the fields with the only drop of moisture they get during the long summer drought. Nature is marvellously provident. But how these uncanny plants become succulent on white sand and limestone rock is one of her secrets. The tunny fish is another example of her foresight. It is, you know, one of the main industries of the island. The fishing and canning and preserving of this monster fish gives employment to many thousands. In the warm weather, when every other kind of fish is unfit for human

food one hour after it is dead, the kindly tunny keeps fresh and sweet.

The day the tunny fishing commences in the island there is a great jollification. It has become quite a national festival. I think you might say that tunny fish, sulphur, grapes, almonds, and lemons, are the most valuable objects of commerce in this poor little island. Then the fig-tree is another of Nature's providences. It leafs later than almost any other tree, and remains green and shade-giving when the tenderer-leaved trees are burnt dry.

It is a curious thing that in the landscape it is the trees only which remind a Northerner that these warm days are spring and not summer. For although the English summer wild-flowers are in blossom and the pig's-face is dirty with dust, the trees are still skeletons in armour.

Doris says she frequently thinks that some leafless tree has been blighted, it seems so out of keeping with the flowers and the hot sunshine. I do not know a *barren* fig-tree when I see it, but all fig-trees without their leaves look naked. Madame Politi it was who first made the remark, and it is a fact.

"There is something immodest to me about their bareness," she said. "I cannot explain why, but fig-trees always seem humanly naked to me." Certainly the one fig-tree in her garden looks a most uncovered creature; perhaps it is the sharp contrast to the glorious green of the almond-trees.

Most of the guests in the hotel are beginning to arrange their plans for visiting the other show-places of the island. Taormina is on every one's lips. It is one of those things upon which you are allowed no individual opinion. It has been called

the most beautiful place in Sicily since tourists first began to explore, and woe to the person who denies it, even Professor Freeman!

Another scholarly visitor has honoured our hotel to-day—the provost of an Oxford college. Poor Miss Persephine, perceiving nothing more in him than a reserved Englishman, started telling him a few facts about the history of Syracuse. Dear lady, she got hopelessly mixed over the Greek and Latin names of her twelve gods. She told him “she didn’t know now whether it was Artemis or Diana who metamorphosed the nymph Arethusa into the fountain of that name, for one writer seemed to say it was Diana and another that it was Artemis. But as Professor Freeman writes about Sicily as if it belonged to him she had determined to follow him.”

What that poor provost endured I cannot conceive, but never by a look or a sign did he let out that he knew the maiden by both her Greek and Latin names. It is astonishing what a very long way a little knowledge goes with an American. They utilise it like their dollars—to the best advantage, and thrash it out like chewing-gum. Miss Persephine goes in for being a bit of a geologist, and her plate at lunch and dinner is surrounded by small pieces of stone.

“She is gradually removing Achradina,” Doris said. “The Government shouldn’t allow it.” I wonder how much she will remember of the history of Syracuse when she gets to Taormina. How delightfully fogged she will be by the time she reaches New Boston over Hephæstus and Vulcan, and Poseidon and Neptune! Dear, kind lady, she has offered to take the provost over the fortress of Euryalus to-morrow and point him out



“ Here in Sicily of course everything is intense. It is brilliant sunshine or deep shade, there are no
half tones even in life.”

[To face p. 100.]

the famous wall of Dionysius. "Americans may know enough to come in when it rains," Doris says, "but they seldom know enough to hold their tongues."

I wish you would send me by parcels post a box of good sweets—not opera peppermints. Ask Fullers to make you up a popular selection of their most popular candies. Doris is craving for something really sweet. The sugar here, which costs as much as a franc a pound, has no more sweetness in it than the rocks of Achradina, and not so much nourishment, judging by the pig's-face.

It was the old general who gave me the idea.

"How is your little friend?" he said. "I have not seen her for two days; I have been confined to my room. But I have got the Catania paper with excellent war news; I should like to read it to her." The old beggar looked at me quizzically as he spoke.

I said she was very well.

"My man has been trying all over Syracuse to get me some French sweets for her. She looks as if she ought to be fed on sweets. But there isn't one to be got."

I almost said, "Confound your impudence!" but refrained. "I fancy you underrate her intellectual appetite," I replied coldly.

"Oh no," he said, "I don't; but I should like to give her the sweets she is pining for. I know she is, because I have seen her eating lumps of sugar on the sly, and you know you don't get much 'forrarder' on Syracusan sugar."

To-day we saw a most painful sight, and one which you will scarcely credit as possible. A wretched skeleton of a horse, which was drawing a cart, full of lemon refuse, had a deep wound in its

side literally plastered up with red sealing-wax! The wound had been caused by the chafing of the shaft against the beast's side.

Doris caught my hand in hers while we were passing it. I saw her eyes fill with tears.

"Do let us go back to our garden, dear friend; this is one of my black days, when I see all the halt and maimed and suffering things in Sicily. There are days when you seem to have eyes for what is wholly distressing. In London it is the drunken men and women, and evil-faced little children whom I see; here it is starving men and women, and ill-used animals. There are other days when all these things disappear, and I see only the Madonna-faced mothers and the tenderly loved children. On these days Sicily is so beautiful that it is a joy and a privilege to know her."

We were silent for a moment. I did not know how to answer. A man so often wounds the fine sensibilities of a woman when he least means it, and is most desirous of comforting.

"Please don't say it is 'liver,' " she said, withdrawing her eloquent hand, "or think it without saying it, for it isn't. Surely every one has those days of sharp contrast, even in England. Here in Sicily of course everything is intense. It is brilliant sunshine or deep shade, there are no half-tones even in life. The people are gay or sad. While the luxury of the rich is a foolish, wanton luxury, self-indulgent and sensual, the poverty of the poor is naked and appalling."

"But even in Sicily," I said, "there is not more night than day. You must have your black clouds, or your simple joy of living in the golden sunshine would lose its keenness. To enjoy things intensely you must suffer in proportion. Carlyle, I think it

is who says ‘The quantity of sorrow he has, does it not mean withal the quantity of sympathy he has, the quantity of faculty and victory he shall yet have?’ Our sorrow is the inverted image of our nobleness. The depth of our despair measures the capability and height of claims we have to hope.”

“How full of understanding!” she said. “I must read Carlyle. Where does that come from?”

“He is referring especially to Cromwell in his times of mental depression,—in the early days of inaction, when blackness assailed his great soul, and melancholia was a more dreaded enemy to fight and conquer than all the king’s men.”

Doris and I have travelled together so far on the winding road of friendship that we often enjoy walking without speaking, more than chattering without feeling. Francesco, our cabman, turns round and smiles to us if we are silent too long. He fancies the signorina is dull: her companion is too old; he has not the sentiment or the gaiety of an Italian on such an occasion.

Suddenly, while we were driving home, a flock of goats, which seemed evil enough to have been the actual beasts put on the left side in the Book of the Revelation, surrounded our low victoria and literally covered the road. Black goats, brown goats, and white goats, all with leering, fiendish faces, stormed our way like a company of the “Devil’s Own.”

There was a fine tinkling of copper bells, cool to the ear as the babbling of a Scotch burn, and some of the animals wore immense wooden collars gaily painted. Their colouring reminded me of the painted wooden household gods and horse-collars of Norway.

“I suppose these cumbersome collars are worn

as a punishment by the goats who steal their own milk?" Doris said.

The goatherd was one of those beautiful boys whom you find now and again in Sicily in the most unlikely surroundings. His clothes were simple goatskin, and his feet were bound with thongs made of their hide. Hanging from his back was a flageolet of green reeds. Doris asked him to make music on it, which he did uncommonly well. He had fashioned it himself out of a donax reed.

He was a charming piece of rustic beauty and as happy-souled as a lizard. His goats knew his voice so well that one word from him would make them halt or march. This company of the Evil One was well trained. Doris was of course perfectly enchanted with the boy; he had successfully obliterated the memory of the wounded horse.

"I want to buy him," she said, "and to keep him at that age for ever. Look at his grey-blue, inscrutable Sicilian eyes; his short, crisp curls, and that nose as straight and perfect as any they chiselled in ancient marble! He is one of Sicily's perfect human things of fresh air and sun, one of her most successful efforts. But what a mask a face is, after all! With those classic brows and those deep mysterious eyes one would expect to find a delicate mind, a shepherd poet; but I suppose he is a universal human boy in disguise, after all."

I pointed to a piece of rough brown bread and the bunch of green-leaved white-rooted fennel in one pocket, and to a small native earthenware flask which showed its grape-stained nose out of the other slit in the goatskin coat.

"If that is his entire food for the day, he is a most æsthetic person. I suppose, when he is not



"We made a trip up the famous river Anapo. . . . The papyrus grows as high as twenty feet and groves of it border either side of the river."
[To face p. 104.]

composing sweet music to the winds and sky, he lies about on the hot white rocks in a blessed state of *dolce far niente*. One day he will be called upon to serve his country, and for two years those fresh young limbs will be deformed by ill-shaped, baggy trousers, and the poor classical feet will be forced into boots either too large or too small. Yet, I suppose, the army is Italy's national civiliser."

Our days in Syracuse are drawing to a close. Doris is going to Palermo, and I am permitted to act as her escort for a few days, at Girgenti, en route. She is also quite determined to sleep for one night in the wonderful mountain-town of Castrogiovanni. This her guardian has not permitted her to do, as the city is in the centre of the brigand country. However, if she means going, I must see her safely to Palermo, and take in a glimpse of Castrogiovanni by the way.

As you may surmise, I do not look forward with any degree of pleasure to this trip to Palermo. I dread anything that may disturb the happiness of our companionship. We are going because every one else in the hotel is going somewhere. It is warm enough now to visit Taormina and Girgenti, so the tourists are like the swallows, gathering together in their companies for flight. In England this mustering of the swallows in the late summer is always a sudden and unpleasant reminder to me of grey skies and cold winds. A little chill creeps through your bones, although the day is fine, as you watch their numbers increase, while they swoop and circle in the air, as it does when a funeral passes through some gay thoroughfare. You have not yet thought of the winter, the summer which you waited for so patiently has been too short; often it has never come at all. The flowers in the garden,

which cost you many cold months of toil and care, seem only to have blossomed for a day. Yet the swallows knell the hour of parting summer; that they are well advised you may be sure.

Yours,
J. C.

VILLA POLITI, SYRACUSE,
February, 1900.

DEAR LOUISE,—

We made a trip up the famous river Anapo yesterday. Herr Mackintosh and the three sisters accompanied us. The heads of the papyrus-plants which are the things you really go to see and try to steal, are very like glorified *cyperus*, the feathery-headed rush which men cart round our London streets in barrows in the autumn. The papyrus grows as high as twenty feet, and groves of it border either side of the river, which is so narrow in some parts that our boat passed under a continuous arch of green for about half a mile. On a warm Sicilian day, when our eyes had grown weary of the glittering white country, the cool shade afforded by these semi-tropical plants was most gracious. The swish-swish of our oars as the boatmen dragged them through the green reeds, and the moving of the light feathery heads in the breeze, did wonders to revive us, for the early part of the journey had been dull and uninteresting.

This is the only place in Europe, I believe, where the papyrus-plant grows wild; there may be some few beds planted in fountains, or in garden lakes, but the papyrus of the Anapo was brought to Sicily by the Arabs when it was used by the ancients for making paper. It is even attributed to Philistis, the lovely Egyptian wife of Hiero II., whose beauty is immortalised on her husband's coins. I was glad to see that it is most carefully guarded

now ; not more than one head is allowed to be cut for each boat-load of visitors.

Miss Adonaey was greatly distressed over this, as she had promised to take a twenty-foot-high reed, with a fine head on it, back to the Professor of Greek in the Lynn University, Mass. But the boatmen were not to be bribed ; I fancy the heavy fine they have to pay if they are found out makes their morals incorruptible. On the banks of the stream where the plants are most luxurious, watchers are hidden in the thickets to spy upon the boats passing up the stream.

The river ends in the beautiful "Fountain of Cyane," which is really only a thirty-foot-deep natural round basin surrounded with papyrus, into which a clear spring bubbles up from beneath. It is a most romantic spot, and the clearness of the water is amazing. Big grey-mullet play round about and inspect the bottom of the boats in the most fearless fashion.

The German decided that we should have lunch here so that the fish might benefit by our crumbs.

He was most attentive to Miss Rosina and untiring in his efforts to capture a chameleon for her. We had seen a great number of these strange little creatures darting about among the stems of the papyrus. Herr Mackintosh is greatly amazed at Miss Rosina's lack of appetite. He pressed her to try some beef which was cut in slices and folded in some cool lettuce leaves.

"But you must eat!" he exclaimed. "Dis is very goot ; I haf tasted it mineself. It is zee fillet, zee most sumptuous part of zee animal."

Doris could not refrain from laughing.

"Fancy any Sicilian animal being sumptuous!" she said ; "but it is a good description of an English fillet."

Miss Rosina followed the example of Doris and let her frail fingers play in the warm water as our boat moved slowly home. As if by accident Herr Mackintosh let his hand also slip into the water on Miss Rosina's side of the boat. She did not withdraw hers, but her delicate face became so suffused with blushes that Miss Persephine, perceiving her heightened colour, exclaimed :

“ Rosina, my dear, you are feeling the sun : change sides with me—it will make you quite sick ! ”

“ No, thank you, sister,” replied Miss Rosina with some spirit, “ I like it ; it will not do me any harm ; it will do me good.”

Doris of course kept her head turned decently to the other side of the boat.

“ It seems so absurd to be spoony in a black German mackintosh on a bright sunny day,” she said afterwards. “ It quite spoilt the sentiment. But it would be pleasanter to let *him* hold your hand *in* the water than *out* of it. Which shows that Miss Rosina knows something about Germans.”

To keep our minds diverted from the matter in hand, Herr Mackintosh explained to us most clearly and simply the classical legend about the Fountain of Cyane. The nymph Cyane was trying to prevent Pluto from eloping with Proserpine to the infernal regions, when she was metamorphosed into that azure spring. This is the second fountain in Syracuse which owes its birth to the metamorphosis of a nymph. You remember my telling you that the Fountain of Arethusa bears a similar legend. But what interests us English more is the fact that it was at the fountain of Arethusa that Nelson watered his ships before the battle of the Nile. Since Nelson's time, however, an earth-

quake has seen fit to change the fresh spring into salt water ; and as the simple days of nymphs are over, I fear it must remain salt, although Sicily cannot well spare her fresh water. It was careless of the earthquake, as the sea is everywhere, while the river beds are dry and dusty. Doris said the earthquake might have turned its attention to the sea, and done some good by changing *that* into fresh water. For your benefit I will quote what Lord Nelson wrote to Sir William and Lady Hamilton, after he left Syracuse on his way south :—" My dear friends, thanks to your exertions, we have victualled and watered ; and surely, watering at the fountain of Arethusa, we must have victory."

We are lazy sightseers, too lazy to leave our boat and the cool shelter of the rustling reeds to visit the two solitary columns which we saw in the distance on the gently rising hill to the left of the stream. Two broken columns are all that to-day remain of the temple of the Olympian Zeus, which belongs to the greatest chapter in Syracusan history.

Doris insisted upon Herr Mackintosh telling us all about it while we listened comfortably in the boat.

" It is much too late in the day to begin doing methodical sight-seeing," she said. " If we let ourselves think of all the things we haven't ' done ' in Syracuse we should be utterly miserable. We have lived amongst classical fragments and got far too used to seeing them in the landscape to remember to ' do ' them. What you see very often you are so apt to forget."

I could give you a list, Louise, long enough to frighten an American, of " sights " which I have not even mentioned in my letters. But how can we exhaust in one bright spring what it took

centuries of ancient history to create? It seems presumptuous to try.

However, Herr Mackintosh has "done" it, although I doubt if he has made acquaintance with our little friends the blue irises, or the happy family who live in the tomb. He knows, of course, all about the disputed tomb of Archimedes, and the tomb of Timoleon, and the lost tomb of Gelon, and all the other tombs of the ancient Syracusan swells. But Doris and I prefer to keep our acquaintance with the goat-cheese family strictly private. There are some things that one grows jealous of a third person seeing as well as hearing.

Great Scott! While I was writing just now, Doris almost threw her arms round my neck with the news that Cronje has surrendered unconditionally. He has thrown up the sponge. How strangely the news came! The captain of H.M.S. Royal Sovereign is staying in this hotel with his wife. He went into the city of Syracuse this morning, and the news was signalled ashore to him from his ship, which is riding at anchor in the Great Harbour; the information had been telegraphed from Malta. So for once we have had our war news from a definite and sure source.

The captain met Doris on his way through the garden to the hotel and told her the good news.

How will Rumanio behave to-night, I wonder? The attractions of Miss Rosina have tempered the feelings of Herr Mackintosh on the subject of süd Africa. Miss Rosina is all with the English, of course, and is as jealous of our honour as the most ardent Britisher born. How differently people take the news of our losses or success!

One old gentleman made Doris feel very foolish. She did not know him, but having good news to

tell made her feel that all English exiled as we are should be friends at such moments.

Coming on her way through the garden to tell me, she passed him seated at a little table examining some pieces of "rubbish," as she called them.

"Have you heard the news?" she asked gaily, and in almost breathless excitement.

"What news?" he replied, lifting his cold eyes for one moment from the magnifying-glass he held in his hand.

"Cronje has surrendered," she told him, "unconditionally! Isn't it splendid?"

Doris looks delightful when things are "splendid," but this did not affect him.

"Has he?" he said laconically, turning his eyes once more on the stones. "I suppose it was expected eventually."

"I wanted," Doris said to me, "to sweep my hand across the table and throw over the walls of the *latomia* all the horrid pieces of dry bones and ancient skulls. Why should decayed bones of forgotten Greeks be more interesting to an Englishman than the lives of his living countrymen? In a thousand years from now I suppose he would think even an English Tommy's skull interesting! I am not sure, but I *think* I put my tongue out at him and fled! His back was turned, of course."

"Oh, Doris!" I rejoined, "and I thought you were growing up! But I know now that you steal Madame Politi's sugar and put your tongue out!"

"I eat sugar because nobody gives me any sweets," she replied; "and some old men *make* you put your tongue out. The lizards do it so often that I have caught their trick."

She held her provoking face so close to mine while she spoke, that if by chance I had turned my head our faces must have met; but I remembered

the many privileges which a little exercise of will had blessed me with, and my face remained turned to my letter.

“ I am getting so tired of human fossils, aren’t you?” she said with a sigh.

“ Little one,” I replied, “ if it weren’t for you I expect I should be just the same as all the rest.”

“ No, you wouldn’t,” she said. “ However old you are you will die young, and however young these people are in years they were born old. They have all such long noses! I know long noses are considered intellectual, but I always think a woman with a long nose looks disappointed. There is something cheerful about a short nose, and it keeps its youth better, and gets through the world without showing which way the wind blows, doesn’t it?”

“ Some short noses,” I replied, “ were made to tempt mankind. They have a provoking impudence about them which inspires us to teach their owners how to behave—to tame the shrew.”

“ Yes,” she said, “ long noses are always tame, even in their cradles.”

Our few precious days are flying past on golden wings, and there is an astonishing amount to do in a place like this if once the charm of it gets hold of you.

How hours pass unnoticed at open windows, watching the south, or listening to the cathedral bells as they float to us up here, mellowed to a silver sweetness by their passage across the blue water! The sound of those evening bells travelling through the vaulted garden unconsciously commands at least a moment’s silence, a little sense of aloofness from others as the day departs, a hush of thankfulness for things received. Then there is Etna to bow the knee to, not too hurriedly, every

night and morning. And, alas! at 12 noon and 6 p.m. the *table d' hôte* meals use up three precious hours of each day.

After that your golden day goes no further than a guinea when a sixpence has been taken out of it to buy stamps.

Yours,
J. C.

VILLA POLITI, SYRACUSE,
Ash Wednesday.

DEAR LOUISE,—

To us this is the first day of summer, for Etna has lost her covering of snow and therefore the air is warm even in the shade. While the snow lies well over the mountain there is a fresh coolness in the air which makes you seek the sun rather than the shade. But to the Sicilians this is only the first day of spring, and a grand holiday they are making of it. Last night King Carnival died in Syracuse, and whether Ash Wednesday is reckoned a Church festival or secular, I do not know; but the whole world is enjoying itself in Sicily. Every cave along rocky Achradina is filled with happy family parties having their first picnic out of the city. Grandfathers, grandmothers, young husbands and wives, and lovers, all are there, while the babies play about the sunny rocks like young kids.

In England too often the old people are left at home on such outings, and the lovers take their pleasures sadly if they are not permitted to spend the day by themselves. Here in simple Sicily they all sit in a family circle round the midday meal, happier because of the family gathering. You would be surprised at the elegance of the coiffured heads of the young women. They are as glossy and dark as a raven's wing, and in many cases gaily ornamented with would-be tortoiseshell pins.

Doris wonders how these girls, living in the humblest parts of a forgotten city, gain their know-

ledge of hair-dressing. They are always abreast of the latest mode. They all carry a bright scarf of silk and wool to throw over their heads at sundown. Hats, of course, find no place in their wardrobes, although their dresses are pretty and tastefully made. These holiday-makers of Achradina have little in common, I can assure you, with the August Bank Holiday picnic-makers of Hampstead Heath.

In one of the *latomias* called the Latomia de Paradiso, is contained the Ear of Dionysius, so called because of the legend related of Dionysius that he had the walls of this quarry cut in such a remarkable manner that the slightest sound in any part of the grotto can be heard by a person seated in the aperture at the upper end. Dionysius is supposed to have hidden himself there and listened unobserved to all that the prisoners said down below. On account of this rather trumped-up story this particular *latomia* is highly popular,—Sicilians love a trick or 'cute invention,—but it is not nearly so beautiful as the Latomia di S. Venera, which abounds in glorious vegetation. There is a curious and lovely lagoon, however, in it, and of course a *pièce d'eau* is always popular with people who live in a dry land where no water is.

In this *latomia* a dance was taking place under the shelter of an immense overhanging rock. The young men formed one half of the circle, while the girls with their chaperons formed the other. As we passed to pay our respects to the cool lagoon and to the popular Ear, a musician started a favourite Neapolitan air, and the dance opened. No one can ever stand quite still in blood or body when a Neapolitan tune is being well played,—it makes the nerves tingle like new wine.

“Look!” Doris said, “the men are all dancing together, and the girls are doing the same. How

very dull ! The lovers can only make eyes at each other and hope for better things."

"It is one of the customs introduced from the East," I said, "which has never died out. In the East such a thing as a waltz, or any dance where a man and woman dance together, would be deemed shocking. In Italy, amongst the lower orders the tarentella is, I believe, one of the few dances where two people of opposite sex dance alone and together. In it, of course, the girl and the man dance either a few feet apart, facing each other, or back to back."

"Poor dears!" Doris said; "what a lot they miss by being so particular! I'm glad I'm only a middle-class Englishwoman, and not an exclusive Sicilian pauper."

As a rule, there is very little music to be heard in Sicily, no singing or playing in the streets; but to-day there's a sound of music and revelry in the air, and along the dusty highroad which leads from the city to the Greek theatre there is an endless stream of high-wheeled Sicilian carts bearing their full complement of Sicilian families. How happy they all look! how simple! how picturesque! Not a bit of shade from cap or umbrella to save men or children's heads from the blazing sun, and not an inch of free room to release a still limb. The old men amuse themselves playing with the boys as if they were frolicsome puppies, while the young mothers, for this one day at least, are free from care. Happy lovers sit behind, speaking with their eyes as only Sicilians can.

The whole aspect of the thing pleased Doris exceedingly—this emptying of the city into the country to spend the first warm day in perfect happiness, asking nothing better of God and man than the joy of living in a beautiful land.

There were no Aunt Sallys erected in Neapolis, nor noisy merry-go-rounds. The people, like ourselves, had no desire for such things. They had journeyed to enjoy the country.

I noticed that the authorities of Syracuse were careful to protect their ancient monuments from any harm which might befall them on a general holiday. Two mounted policemen, very grand fellows in Sunday plumes, patrolled the Greek theatre and watched the road to the amphitheatre. Not that I think it was the least necessary, for I do not believe that even a Syracusan "hooligan" would abuse the relics of which the country is so justly proud. He is not the London arab, who is born with an instinct for flinging a stone at any object he has never seen before.

Here in Sicily a hundred generations of boys have lived and played amongst these favourite ruins, until the Castle of Euryalus, the Ear of Dionysius, and the National monuments generally have become as familiar to them as the lions of Trafalgar Square are to their cousins at home. . . .

While we are here in Sicily unconsciously studying ancient history, how quickly modern history is making in South Africa! Before the English papers have reached us to confirm the news that Cronje has indeed surrendered, word comes that Lord Dundonald has entered Ladysmith. The Catania paper reports that "*London is delirious with excitement. The ladies of high society are dancing in all the streets, and the men and women throw about oranges and fruit and flowers at Covent Garden. Ladies do not object to policemen kissing them in the streets. For once England has become mad with joy.*"

This is not bad for a Catania paper, is it now?

Miss Rosina fell to weeping on Doris's neck to-night, half from excitement over the good news and half out of alarm for her own feelings. She is ashamed to acknowledge to herself that her life has been a little more interesting since she has become interesting to the German. I believe she considers it a want of fine feeling to feel her sorrow less keenly. I wonder if a German will ever quite understand such delicate sensibilities?

But Doris says it doesn't signify.

"Women don't expect men to understand them; when they do, they are generally bad, and to be avoided as husbands. The simple, direct, manly men who can do no more than love and wonder are safer. When a man ceases to wonder he begins to be bored."

Doris asked Miss Rosina if the German had already proposed to her, for if he had not there was no reason to vex herself. No woman over twenty need have a proposal if she would rather not.

"He has not actually offered me his hand, my dear," she said timidly.

"But he took it in the water," Doris said, "and you did not withdraw it."

Miss Rosina blushed.

"Oh, my dear, did every one see it? How dreadful! But he has very powerful wrists."

"All lovers have," Doris said; "German or English—the nationality doesn't matter."

"What shall I do?" Miss Rosina asked, in blushing trepidation. She liked the idea of strength. "He has not actually said anything which could be taken seriously; but once you have a knowledge of men, my dear, you always know when they are in earnest. He is so thoughtful, so careful that I should not sit in draughts."

"Then I'm sure he would make you a good

husband," Doris said. "Do accept him, Miss Rosina; you really ought to."

"He is lonely, my dear, and if I thought I could make his life a little brighter, I would."

"I'm sure you could, and although a German might not be a very exciting lover, a German husband would be very orthodox. You could be a useful companion to him, and you could help him in his work." ("I don't know what his work is," Doris said to me, laughing; "but I know the German Government does not permit men or women of leisure.") "You really ought to try to forget the other one."

"Don't ask me to forget him, my dear, for I never could do that. He was a—a glorious lover! Herr Mackintosh is only a man whom I can respect enough to marry."

And then she fell to weeping again over her lost lover.

"Dear child," she cried to Doris, "dear child, the emptiness of these years—the emptiness! Sometimes I have felt the touch of his hand, and such a wave of delicious emotion has filled me that my very 'cheeks' have burnt. Then sister would say, 'Rosina, you are flushed: has the wind been too much for you?' And back would come the emptiness and the dragging, useless hours."

"I took the old dear in my arms," Doris said, with a sob in her voice as she told me, "and loved her a great deal. Poor, frail, little sentimental Miss Rosina! Once she is married to the German it will be all right; but she will have many a cry before she can make up her mind to desecrate the memory of her glorious lover. . . ."

"Miss Persephine has made a great mistake," she went on musingly. "She has spent twenty years of her life in sheltering Miss Rosina from

mankind, and in loving and taking sweet care of her; what the poor thing really wanted was something or some one to take care of. Women are born to take care of things, and their lives go wrong when that want is denied. We are given dolls to make mock babies of, and dolls' houses to represent real homes; and when we are married we have husbands whom we love all the more if they are helpless. If women are refused husbands and children they fly to county councils and school boards. But most of us prefer husbands and babies; they require more considerate management."

"And have you no thought for the poor men who have no women to take care of them?" I said—"the helpless ones you spoke of?"

"No man need want one," she said; "there is always a woman somewhere longing to mother a lonely man. A villain has only to look helpless, and a good woman will forgive him enough to marry him."

"I see," I said: "I must act the villain and wear a helpless look. The worst of it is, my life has been so self-reliant about matters that usually appeal to a woman's pity, and my features are cast in a homely mould not suited to a villain's."

"Some men," she said, "prefer remaining unmarried. They forget their duty to women."

Yours, in the late hours of a warm Sicilian night,
J. C.

VILLA POLITI, SYRACUSE,
February 28th, 1900.

MY DEAR LOUISE,—

Doris and I have said good-bye to our garden this morning, the saddest, for I knew that nothing again can take its place in my heart at least.

“How unhappy the old American lady would be,” Doris said—the one with the pretty maid and the manservant, who made love together all day long in the *latomia* while their mistress was studying Italian—if she had left undone as many things as we have!”

“And done as many things as we ought not to have done?” I inquired.

I got no answer.

“I suppose a pretty girl only *ought* to do what she wants to do,” I said presently, returning to the charge. “You need have nothing on your conscience.”

“Are the things that you have done troubling you?” she asked.

“No,” I said, “it is something which I have left undone which annoys me most.”

“The old lady,” she went on, not regarding my remark, “makes a point of repeating to herself every night before she goes to sleep all that she has seen since she came to Europe. For the first three nights it was comparatively easy, but as the things multiplied into hundreds and hundreds it almost drove her crazy. It makes her dread starting out

for a long day's sight-seeing. Just fancy, after a day spent in doing ancient Syracuse, having to repeat to yourself before you went to sleep all that you had seen on that day added to all that you had seen in Rome and Florence. I would rather be her maid, and allow myself to be fed on golden oranges down in the green *latomia*."

Etna is still with us, but her ethereal beauty is now a thing of the past. Her spotless virginity is tarnished. You can see the black lava fields and the rocky foothills of her mighty foundations. Her mystery has vanished.

"You feel when you look at her," Doris said, "like a young man who suddenly realises that his lady-love is not an angel, that her hair is waved with 'Hinde's.'"

So far, snow-dazzling Etna, smiling a million enchanting moods caught from sun and clouds, has been an ideal. You have never pictured her to yourself as a vast hiding-place for hundreds of poor villages, where men and women and children drive out starvation by patient industry and grim philosophy. You do not remember the deadly streams of engulfing lava she has vomited out on such poor homes. To you her beautiful mouth, kissing the high heavens, was made for something fairer. No, we have never thought of the dark side of Mother Etna; her beauty has blinded us.

But to-day, dear friend, she is a perfectly human mountain. You find yourself for the first time asking practical questions about her length, breadth, height, and her possibilities for accommodating tourists. Her circumference is one hundred and eighty miles; she is most easily ascended from the Taormina district, and there is a railway which completes the circle of her base!

In bidding Syracuse good-bye, I believe we are

leaving one of the most simple spots in Europe. Where else can you find, so closely blended together, the historical interest of an ancient city, which is still an important city to-day, the primitive life of an agricultural country, and the tale of the toilers of the sea? Here heavy oxen plough the fields right down to the blue sea's edge, while the tunny fishers, busy with their nets, are within hailing distance on the sea.

The goats feed on the rocks, near enough to the city to be milked in the streets every night and morning, for the Sicilian wisely prefers seeing his milk drawn from the goat rather than from a can, and the goatherd thinks that the beast might as well carry the milk to the city as himself.

Doris says she would prefer this method of receiving her milk in London, but she is afraid that the county council might object to the herds of cows going from door to door in the busy streets. Sicily is unvexed by the lordship of county councils, and therefore the fine flocks of goats, sounding their low-tongued bells up the narrow streets every morning, are one of Doris's girlish pleasures. But then, as she has often remarked, "Great countries are so very unpicturesque—they are too great to have simple beauties. You are proud of belonging to the greatest, but you prefer living in one that is less great."

We have said good-bye to all our friends. The old general kissed Doris's hands, and kissed and kissed them again. "You are taking all the sunshine with you," he said; "even Sicily will be dull to-day." All the retainers who could by the thinnest blood-tie call themselves relatives to the servants in the hotel gathered themselves together at the foot of the portico steps to bid us adieu. A servant in Sicily always expects his situation to



“ One little cave maiden . . . had brought Doris a bunch of wild flowers
as a parting gift.” [To face p. 124.]

support at least half a dozen of his relatives. This makes it sometimes difficult for a stranger to know how many servants a gentleman's house or an hotel really keeps. It is a relic of the old days, I suppose, when a man's army was composed of his servants.

The three sisters gave us a very tender parting. Herr Mackintosh stood close to Miss Rosina's side. He has assumed for the last two days an air of great proprietorship; he held a German newspaper over her head to protect her from the really fierce sun. One little cave-maiden had slipped through the private door of the garden which opens on to Achradina, and had brought Doris a bunch of wild-flowers as a parting gift. And one of the goatherds brought a baby kid, a blunt-nosed little leggy mite not many days old, and offered it to the signorina.

Doris, it appears, without my knowledge, had paid a parting visit to the tomb of the cheese-makers, and had distributed among the women some of her bodices, what she calls blouses. A little washing we had seen one day, held down to the white rocks with stones, had so touched her heart that she had planned this visit.

There were four little garments, the like of which you have never seen; only a Sicilian would have deemed them worthy of washing. The poor little tattered shift and faded shirt would scarcely hang together; they were long past sewing. Such little baby garments, too, made out of the queerest fragments!

While we were looking at the washing, a small scrap of brown humanity darted out from behind a big rock; it was the naked owner of the little shirt. Did he think we were going to steal it, I wonder? Wise little philosopher, he was making use of God's warm sunshine while his washing was being dried.

To-day I understood why Doris spent so much

time last week in a draper's shop in Syracuse—and such a draper's! She was buying cotton material to fashion into cool blouses, so she told me later. But I did not understand at the time that the blouses were for the goodly row of women who were standing, full of pride in their new finery, waiting to bid us farewell to-day. The wee cutty sark, whom we had discovered from behind the rock, was dressed as comfortably as a child could be.

“It was like their good taste,” Doris said, “to wear the presents I had given to them, to show their gratitude.” And would you believe it, that all these fine, new bodices have been effected by their own ingenuity out of one pound's worth of material. Cotton-prints are so cheap in Sicily, it is sad that a little baby's clothes should be made of patched rags.

“Let us get away quickly,” she went on, “or I shall cry like anything. I can't bear their gratitude, their sad faces, their lovely eyes and smiles. What have I done to deserve it?—only spent one pound between them all. It makes me ashamed. *Avánti! avánti!*” she cried to the patient coachman; and with a mighty cracking of whips, and oft-repeated *addios* to our waving friends, we dashed down the narrow white-walled road, past our field of tombs, on to the road which borders the sea, down to the ferry, and past the washing stream, until at last we were out on the dusty Catania road which leads to the railway station.

“Is it possible that we are passing all these familiar sights for the last time?” Doris whispered. “Our friends, our garden, the dear white hotel and Syracuse are all slipping behind us. Only Etna is journeying with us, still smiling and serene, coldly unconscious of the pain at our hearts.”

A little silence stole between us ; in such moments there is a barrier between even the dearest friends.

I fell to wondering if the unspoken fear which hung like a summer cloud upon my horizon had touched the blue of the girl's. Did she foresee the possibility of the end of our Eden in Sicily? We had not been driven out of our garden, but it was behind us, nevertheless.

Half tears, half smiles, she turned her dear, dear eyes to mine.

"Isn't it absurd?" she said. "We are on pleasure bound, we are starting out to explore fresh fields of beauty, and yet, and yet we are too sad to speak! Saying good-bye is always horrid. One can't help looking back, and back, and back. How we disliked them all at first! Miss Rosina with her faded femininity, the German with his German mackintosh, the dear old general with his horrid Hyblæan honey."

"And me?" I said.

"Yes, and you," she replied; "with your pre-occupied air, looking at me as if I were a silly schoolgirl not worth considering. When I asked you to hand me the milk for my tea, you offered me the mustard. When I told you I didn't take mustard in my tea, I half expected you to tell me that a mustard of Syracuse was mentioned in *Theocritus*,—that you never took anything else with your tea in Sicily."

"I was too amazed to think," I said. "I never expected—none of us ever expected—we had grown so accustomed——"

"You never expected to see a mere girl, in a sailor-hat and a self-respecting blouse; a girl who wasn't so overcome by the greatness of Syracuse, or the burden of 'doing' it, that she could not eat two eggs for breakfast and boldly refuse Hyblæan

honey. Oh, that honey! the very thought of it reminds me of the golden syrup you buy in post-office shops in English villages. The syrup is so thick that it has to be urged out of the tin with the knife which divides its time between the American cheese and the rasher-bacon."

And so with heavy hearts we talked lightly, talked over our happy days in Syracuse, as if we were already many years older than the memories recalled.

"Whenever I think of Syracuse in after years," Doris said, "I shall always see a world of white rocks, white-plastered walls, and white roads touched here and there with the blue-green of the prickly pears: a white desolate scene made more desolate by the black-draped figure of a woman riding a gentle-footed ass."

Yours ever,
J. C.

CASTROGIOVANNI,
March 2nd, 1900.

It is strange to think, dear Louise, that this letter, written in a city ancient and grey, set upon a hill three thousand feet in height, right in the centre of Sicily, will be opened and read by you in a sheltered nook in green Surrey. Will it carry any of the spirit of this place with it, I wonder? Castrogiovanni is cold, and grey, and clean, wind-blown from corner to corner. This is surely not Sicily, we say to each other a hundred times a day; and yet, in the distance, Etna towers over all and checks the words on our lips. Indeed, we feel as if we were in no country named in a cold-blooded matter-of-fact geography which deals with maps and plans. It is all very well to climb the Rigi and spend one night at the top in a modern hotel, waiting for a modern sunrise along with twenty dozen other modern tourists, who are only anxious to be in Lucerne by the next evening. But here are we two, limited to one another for the understanding of speech, quietly playing our part in the daily lives of a people who think nothing strange of the fact that they are the descendants of generations of men and women who have lived up in the clouds and looked down on the plains as we gaze up at the clouds. They have lived cut off from the world by an impregnable height, where only eagles love to soar. Can we, in our modern London, imagine how a city can continue to prosper or even exist

with no traffic in its streets except that of the long trains of handsomely harnessed mules, which carry the olives and grapes to and from the surrounding country ; a city with no hotels and no daily papers ; in fact, a city which possesses none of the attributes of a city ; a city which to modern eyes looks as if it had been abandoned since the Middle Ages ? What has such a city, with its natural walls of precipitous rocks, to do with nineteenth-century men and women ? Doris says that the twenty thousand odd souls who live up here among the wild, scudding clouds have nothing to do with nineteenth-century men and women of our world. But they *are* men and women, with their tragedies and their sorrows. I can see that, for even here balconies and willing servants play a large share in Sicilian love affairs.

We left Syracuse in summer warmth, grudging the burden of providing ourselves with warm wraps, which Madame Politi assured us we should require. Here it is mid-winter, with every drop of water frozen to the breath on my moustache. It is surely the survival of the fittest with the inhabitants, who live to man or womanhood in high Castrogiovanni ; for, with no fires and very little food, children must have a hardy rearing. Certainly the magnificent physique of the men proves such to be the case. I have never seen finer specimens of manhood than the inhabitants of Castrogiovanni ; of the women-folk I cannot speak, for it is not *comme il faut* for women to walk abroad in this ancient city, even little girls being kept carefully guarded indoors. Wherefore the necessity of balconies and willing servants !

Nevertheless this is a wonderful city, the most wonderful thing in Sicily, I think ; for these fine



“A city . . . set upon a hill three thousand feet in height.”

Montesi do not dream that their city, built like an eagle's nest, is not quite abreast with the times.

They point proudly to their electric light : Sicilians love electric light, as they love all new and ingenious mechanical tricks ; and, after all, electric light does look very clever up here, where you expect flares from the ancient palace torches to light you on your way.

From the highest point of the city the whole of the mountainous world seems to lie spread before you ; that is, of course, when the hurrying clouds have rolled off our city, and have stormed some other height, for there are moments and even half-hours in Castrogiovanni when we look at each other dimly through the clouds, as Londoners do through a white fog. But when the clouds lift, a *world* of Alps, not snow-covered as in Switzerland, but green with carob and almond-trees right up to the top, looks greener and more tranquil even than before.

The vegetation is wonderful. Mountains higher than Skiddaw are rich in semi-tropical plants, such as the cactus (prickly-pear) and wild-palms. Olives and vines, it would seem, do not require heat so much as sunshine and dryness, for this bitter frosty weather is usual up here until the late spring. On the summit of this particular mountain there is a famous vineyard, and everywhere the blue-green of the cacti casts a bloom over the distant landscape.

The cloud effects and the varying lights and shades are amazing. If you don't look quickly you are sure to miss some wonder revealed by a rolling body of clouds. Calascibetta, a sister mountain city to Castrogiovanni, was discovered by us in this way. We had not previously dreamt of its existence.

We keep " oh "-ing to each other a great deal, and expressing a wish that we had our friends here

to share the amazing beauty with us, and yet in our hearts I believe the dearest beauty and wonder is that we are here in this cloud-world by our two selves.

I can't tell you what age Doris ascribed to me when she sought and gained permission of her guardian to allow me to take care of her as far as Palermo. But it is of myself I have to take such very great care, in case she guesses a secret which, if she knew, would rob me of her company.

Before going further I should tell you that Castrogiovanni is the historical Enna, or Henna. We have taken it for granted that what Freeman says is true, that "not a vestige is left of the famous temples of Demeter (Ceres) and Proserpine," and therefore we have not troubled our unclassical minds about them. This is shocking, I know, but nevertheless true. We have read, instead, Cicero's account of the city which he visited shortly after Verres had robbed it of sacred treasures. Doris will dictate it to me while I write it out for your edification, as you tell me you have failed to get a copy of Cicero's *Orations* from the library. It gives you a better idea of the classical importance of Enna than anything Freeman has to say on the subject.

"For thoughts of that temple, of that place, of that holy religion came into my mind. Everything seems present before my eyes,—the day on which, when I had arrived at Enna, the priests of Ceres came to meet me with garlands of vervain, and with fillets; the concourse of citizens, among whom, while I was addressing them, there was such weeping and groaning that the most bitter grief seemed to have taken possession of the whole.

"They did not complain of the absolute way in which the tenths were levied, nor of the plunder

of property, nor of the iniquity of tribunals, nor of that man's unhallowed lusts, nor of his violence, nor of the insults by which they had been oppressed and overwhelmed. It was the divinity of Ceres, the antiquity of their sacred observances, the holy veneration due to their temples, which they wished should have atonement made to them by the punishment of that atrocious and audacious man. This indignation of theirs was so great, that you might suppose that Verres, like another king of hell, had come to Enna and had carried off not Proserpine, but Ceres herself. And in truth the city does not appear to be a city, but a shrine of Ceres. The people of Enna think that Ceres dwells among them, so that they appear to me not to be citizens of that city, but to be all priests, to be all ministers and officers of Ceres."

Cicero, of all people, gives us the desired explanation why Sicily is no longer a corn-growing country. He says: "Although there are many and various injuries done by that man to which these things are owing, still this one cause, in the opinion of the Sicilians, is the most weighty of all; for, because of the insults offered to Ceres, they believe that all the crops and gifts of Ceres have perished in these districts."

The brute Verres did not take the actual statue of Ceres; it was too large, the difficulty of transportation from such a city was too great. "But in the right hand of Ceres there stood a beautifully wrought image of Victory; and this he wrenched out of the hand of Ceres and carried off."

Doris does not entirely flout the idea that this insult of Verres to the goddess of corn may have entirely altered the agricultural character of Sicily. How else can we account for the marvellous change? Cicero asks the Roman people how Sicily

was entitled to so much honour and respect from them. "And therefore we have always so esteemed the Island of Sicily for every purpose, as to think whatever she could produce was not so much raised among the Sicilians as stored up in our own homes. When did she not deliver the corn which she was bound to deliver by the proper day? When did she fail to promise us, of her own accord, whatever she thought we stood in need of? When did she ever refuse anything that was exacted of her? Therefore that illustrious Marcus Cato, the wise, called Sicily a storehouse of provisions for our republic—the nurse of the Roman people."

At one end of the city there is a very ancient citadel, called *La Rocca*, which was repaired by King Manfred. At the opposite end of the town there is a castle which was built by Frederick the Second of Aragon. You can imagine that these two ruinous buildings, rising up sheer from the rock on which the city is perched, make two striking features in the general view.

The classical fields of Enna, where Prosperine and her maidens stopped to pick the hundred-headed narcissus, lie in the plains below. On our journey here, from the railway train, we saw hundreds of these delicate spring flowers (I cannot vouch if any one of them were hundred-headed) blowing in the fields. We have brought "Freeman" with us here, as we no longer have Herr Mackintosh to tell us more simply and directly the classical legends of the place. But to tell you the truth, we have been compelled to leave guide-books alone. For such a place as this—"The holiest place of Pagan Sicily," as Freeman calls it—is quite beyond our poor classical understanding.

We must be content to take Castrogiovanni for what it is worth in our blind eyes, and walk gently,

for the place whereon we tread is holy ground—so holy, indeed, that, even blindly ignorant as we are, we can feel the spirit of the past in the hurrying clouds, in the wild sulphurous country, and in this strangest of mediæval cities. The famous Lake Pergusa, so elaborately extolled in the classics, is distinctly disappointing. It is a solitary object made barren of surrounding vegetation by its volcanic nature. You can see it from the outer rim of the city. Perhaps its very desolation gives an air of greater mystery and impressiveness to the scene.

But, as I have often told you, there are ever two Sicilies for us—the one which we love and understand, the beautiful mediæval Sicily in which we two nineteenth-century individuals are privileged to live, and the other, the ancient and classical Sicily, for scholars and archæologists, who know little or nothing of our Sicily.

“Only to open Freeman on a subject like Castrogiovanni makes you shudder,” Doris said: “shudder at your own colossal cheek in venturing to come to such a place. But I did so long to sleep for one night, at least, like an eagle up on the rocks. Its no use my reading anything about the ancient Sikel religion of the place, for I should forget it all in an hour after we had left the town. It is surely better to see and enjoy the things we do understand and shall never forget.”

I quite agreed with her, and so we have resolved to enjoy Castrogiovanni in our own unpretentious way.

After Syracuse it seemed such a green, green world, and the twin hill cities look like two fantastic castles in a German opera. It is hard to believe, when you look at these mystical cities soaring to high heaven, that twenty-five thousand human souls

find a meagre living in them to-day, and yet a living not so meagre after all, although what they make their incomes off it is hard to say—selling grapes and olives to each other, I suppose. But this clean city does not strike the stranger as poverty-ridden, and, strange to say, we have scarcely seen a beggar in the streets. The licensed church poor, of course, do not count; they have the Government hall-mark upon their profession, and are one of the clever contrivances of a pauper country for supporting its paupers by voluntary contribution. The Government license a certain number of poor, who are supposed to be supported by the pittance of the faithful as they visit the church daily to pray. And truly no one is too poor to give to a beggar in Sicily. I have seen touching sights to illustrate this fact. The blind may not lead the blind, but the starving certainly feed the starving.

The men here, even in the day-time, wear fine dark blue cloaks, with high-peaked hood, which they pull on over an inner cap of stockingette, which is worn well over the ears in true Canadian fashion. The cloaks are much larger and handsomer than any we have seen hitherto. Doris is greatly delighted with the sight of these tall mountaineers standing in the wind-blown public squares, top-booted and high-hooded, fine, erect fellows, a strange mixture of prince and mountain-brigand.

When we left the station on our way here—which, although it lies in the plains, is really at an elevation of many hundreds of feet above the sea-level—we were met by the *Regie Poste*, an antiquated stage-coach even for Sicily, with only three seats outside and an uninviting interior seated for six. The driver, who was as goodly a fellow to look at as ever you saw, and as perfectly limbed as the statue of a Grecian athlete, at once took us

under his protection, and was very urgent that Doris should go inside.

After popping her head in, and sniffing the garlic-scented atmosphere with her unintellectual nose, she said resolutely :

“No, not for worlds! If I freeze I can’t go inside. It is better to be frozen than eaten up alive.”

Our host was distressed. The signorina would be very ill. She had no idea how cold it would be driving up the mountain to the city.

We unfastened our hold-all, and Doris consented to be wrapped up in my Scotch Inverness cloak as well as in her own fur coat. And so, with our feet well protected by some suspicious-looking rugs which were drawn from the garlic-smelling interior of the *Regie Poste*, we started for the city-crowned height. What a cracking of whips! what a jingling of bells! what a clear crisp air! Each of the four worn-out horses wore a fine necklace of brass bells.

The flash pace at which we left the station, where we parted from the porters and station-master as if from old friends, soon slackened off after the first mile or so, and the rest of the long and bitterly cold journey was accomplished at a walking rate.

In Syracuse the almond-trees were in leaf and had lost their pink bloom; here every valley and hillside reminds one of a Kentish orchard in full flower. Vegetation is much more backward, although it is wonderfully luxurious. Mighty olive-trees and carobs climb the hills like stately giants.

All the way Doris kept exclaiming, “Oh! oh! oh!” Each burst of delight from her smiling lips brought a bow or an answering smile from our fine driver. His native curiosity was easily aroused in a lovely woman; he was anxious to know what

relation we were to one another. At last he was out with it :

“ Are you his daughter ? ” he asked, pointing to me.

“ No,” Doris answered with dignity.

“ The beautiful signora is perhaps his wife ? ”

I hated the little smile he gave as he asked the question.

“ No,” Doris said, “ I am not his wife.”

“ Ah, he is your uncle ? ”

“ Leave him at that,” Doris said ; “ for a Sicilian would never understand.

And so for the rest of the journey he alluded to me as the “ Signore, your uncle.” He chattered to us all the way, supplying us with a great deal of interesting information and showing throughout a certain amount of intelligence. Doris kept him smiling by her side, for he walked at a brisk pace and let the horses drive themselves.

He evidently thought it was his duty to entertain us, for when he was not talking he sang in a most dramatic manner snatches from well-known operas.

“ You can’t help flirting *just a little bit* with such a man,” Doris said. “ Listen to him singing that song. How can I help answering his eyes ? They are full of laughter and romance and tragedy. If I express my admiration for a certain flower, he manages somehow with very little trouble to himself to find one, and he gives it to me in a way which would put even Miss Rosina’s glorious lover to shame.”

Our admiration received a rude shock, however, at the end of our journey. Our handsome cavalier had made us feel that the paying of our fare would be a delicate moment ; but his fine velvet suit, his slender-footed top-boots gave him the appearance of a good sportsman rather than the driver of the



“Mighty olive-trees,”

[To face p. 138.]

Royal Mail from the station to the city. But when he demanded twenty-five francs as our fare, instead of the three which was the proper tariff, the romance fled!

I pointed to the tariff, written precisely on a card inside the coach.

"Yes," he said, "you are quite right. One and a half francs per head is the fare on any ordinary occasion to convey people to and from the station to the city. But you wrote to the landlord of your hotel and told him you wished a carriage to meet you at the station. I have met you with the Regie Poste; you must pay me twenty-five francs, the price of a carriage hire."

"But you were compelled to meet the train in any case," I said; "you have to carry the mail. We have a right to a seat in the coach at tariff price."

"That has nothing to do with you," he said; "you desired a conveyance, and you have had one. A private carriage would have cost you twenty-five francs, so you must pay me the same."

"No, I will not," I said; "not although I am the only stranger in the country for a hundred miles. I will not be bullied into paying you a cent more than the tariff."

The *padrone* of our inn came to our rescue, and told the fellow to be off; but in a not very summary manner, which argued ill for our chance of being treated with decent honesty by him when the time came for paying our hotel bill.

"A man who can wear a cloak like a draped statue, and speak as if he were singing, and sings like an angel, to end by bullying strangers for six times the amount of their fare; What a blow to my romance!" Doris said. "Is no one in Sicily above begging? For in manner and bearing the

meanest beggar is a born prince, while in bearing and manner the born prince is a beggar."

I must close this letter abruptly if it is to catch the *Regie Poste*, for the villain of whom I have just been writing has come to my room in the most gracious and friendly way to ask me if I have any telegrams or letters to send to the station. He entered, cap in hand, and addressed me as the most illustrious signore. Truly Sicily is a law unto itself, and a wonderful revelation in the gentle art of manners.

Yours,
J. C.

CASTROGIOVANNI,
March 3rd, 1900.

DEAR LOUISE,—

Our Inn ! I wish you could see it. I bitterly repented having let the child stay the night in this terrible place, but we were so taken up with the wonder and beauty of it that we delayed looking at our rooms until it was too late to return to the station by the *Regie Poste*. We were ushered into the dilapidated old monastery (where we were told that rooms were prepared for us) by an old man, who was so completely wrapped up in cloaks and shawls that there was little to be seen of him but his wicked black eyes and snuff-discoloured nose. We stumbled along a dark and wet-smelling passage, and felt our way up a frail staircase not two feet in width, and turned along a still darker passage. The trembling old man in the shawl called out to us to beware of a hole in the floor of the passage, and also of the Greek-water jugs which were lying in the way. Suddenly he stopped, and put a heavy key into a heavy lock in a very frail and foolish door. Like all Sicilian locks, the key turned twice and in the opposite direction to ours. It groaned and reluctantly unlocked. The huge room into which we were asked contained one small bed, with the mattress and bed-clothing rolled in a bundle ; the wooden boards in place of springs did not look sympathetic. There was also a small camp washing-stand and a window.

Doris ran and inspected the bed.

"It's quite clean," she said, with happy eyes. "This place is too cold for fleas, so nothing else matters. Tell the man we will stay. Is your room next door? I hope so."

"I will sleep on your mat if it isn't," I said. "We ought never to have come to such a place."

"I think it is great fun. I'm not a bit afraid . . . at least, not *now*."

"Not now," I thought. "That is true enough; but what of the night, when all children and feminine things see fear and avoid corners?"

There is no front door to the wretched hovel, and any fool with a good push could thrust his body through the thin panel of the bedroom doors. The heavy lock was a grim jest.

"Will you tell the old ruffian that we will stay?" she repeated. "I want to get out into the sunshine again. These rooms are so cold, they make one nervous."

"I want to ask his price," I said, "or he will demand six times the just price when we leave."

"Even six times the just price won't be much in a place like this. He can't ask more than five francs a day even at that rate."

"Remember your cavalier, the coachman," I said, "and let him be a lesson. A Sicilian can ask anything."

"I don't like lessons," she said. "I never learnt them; and when I did I always forgot them."

Out in the street it was bitterly cold, but the evening was bright and clear. We soon found ourselves escorted about the city by some nicely mannered boys who constituted themselves our guides.

They belonged to the seminary of Castrogiovanni, and were well up in the classical history of the

place. They at once offered to show us the supposed site of the Temple of Ceres. They were very proud of their knowledge of French, which was the French of Castrogiovanni and not much easier to understand than their local Sicilian. These boys acted as a sort of bodyguard, and helped to keep off the too-inquisitive inhabitants, who stared at us as if we had been strange objects let out from a show. The whole city followed us about with unabating interest. But Doris and I have grown accustomed to this sort of thing. We have often gathered together a following of people in the narrow streets of Syracuse that any Salvation Army band would be proud of. These followers do not molest strangers in any way, but their presence sometimes gets embarrassing, especially when you meet a fellow-countryman. On such occasions you feel a fool and look one.

You must know that we are now in the heart of the brigand country, and this has been a very brigandy year. Before coming here our consul in Syracuse warned us not to make any excursions from Castrogiovanni into the surrounding country. We were to keep to the Government road; which is heavily garrisoned, and commands an extensive view of the country. Doris is rather disappointed, I think, that so far we have not to our knowledge even seen a brigand; and yet, as she says, if brigands are, as we are told, only farmers fallen upon evil days, we probably have seen many. These courtly-looking old gentlemen riding their fine mules up the steep road to the city have probably turned their hands to brigandage in their day, as their sons will do in theirs! If the olive crop is good and the vintage is rich, they are glad enough, no doubt, to remain peaceful citizens; if times are bad, then

their deeds will be likewise ; the mountain fastnesses are then their homes.

Only the other day, if you would believe it, a beautiful girl was kidnapped in broad daylight in Palermo, while out walking with her mother, and was driven off into the country by her daring lover. She was waiting to cross the corso, when suddenly her arms were pinioned behind her, and she was lifted into a closed carriage, a handkerchief being flung over the mother's eyes at the same moment.

If this sort of thing can still take place in the main thoroughfare of their capital, what ho for the brigands of Castrogiovanni !

The green fields and the flowing waters in the rich valleys of this region of Sicily bring to mind the scenery described by Theocritus much more than the rocky wastes round Syracuse. This indeed seems a poet's ideal country, and you can well imagine it as the site chosen for the centre of the ancient Sikelian religion. It was naturally to the hills they lifted their eyes, and, having lifted them, they chose this crowning height for the foundation of their Mother Temple.

It is hard to convey to you the true atmosphere of the place, which is indeed heavy with the spirit of the past. You have sometimes felt that the ghosts of the Middle Ages haunt and linger in some quaint old-fashioned town. Here we are actually in the Middle Ages, haunted by the ghosts of Pagan nymphs and deities.

When seven o'clock came we mentioned to our student friends that we were anxious to discover the restaurant where our landlord had told us we could find our meals. They gladly escorted us to a house in the public square—the “ only restaurant suitable for the signorina.” It was almost opposite the dilapidated monastery. The fine pale-green bronze

grills in front of the monastery windows gave the exterior of the building quite a handsome appearance. The boys left us with a request that they might be allowed to act as our guides again next morning. Doris, of course, consented. She cannot refuse these gentle-mannered Sicilian boys. They are always her most devoted slaves, and these boys, of course, desire no fees.

The entrance to our restaurant was blocked by a flock of white goats. A gipsy-looking woman was seated on the lowest step of the stone stairs which we had to mount to reach the dining-room. She was busy milking a magnificently horned animal; she made way for us to pass up the stairs, while the goat inspected us suspiciously. On reaching the top we looked down upon the typical Sicilian scene. The goat was still watching us with evil, blinking eyes. Truly goats are Sicily, and Sicily is goats. "Temples and tombs and goats," Doris said. "These are the three things which linger in the mind, and whose memory never deserts one."

On our way upstairs we passed the kitchen. It had the usual solid brick stove, as high as a kitchen table, covered with white china tiles. On the top there were five or six small holes, about as large as would be made by the removal of one brick. These holes were full of hot charcoal, and a handsome copper saucepan was steaming on each. A Sicilian kitchen-maid requires no coal-cellar. She keeps a small straw basket full of broken pieces of fresh charcoal near her stove. When the charcoal embers in the holes absolutely refuse to emit any more heat, a fresh piece, which would not weigh one ounce, is taken from the basket and popped into the hole to renew the fire.

"When you look at their stoves do you wonder

that you are asked to bathe in a teacup?" Doris said. "But the miracle of miracles is, how do they contrive to bake exquisite pastry and delicious messes over two ounces of hot charcoal in a small hole? But I have never tasted a roasted joint in Sicily; a chicken is the largest thing they can achieve, all else is stewed."

An inviting smell greeted us as we passed the open door, and an enormous woman, who was dishing a copper pot full of macaroni called out "Good-evening," and told us to mount still higher. A smart captain of the carabinieri was standing beside the woman. A striking figure he looked in that dark little kitchen, hot with many steams and smells. He wore a bright blue coat, and dangled a very long sword.

"Perhaps he is dressing the salad," Doris said. "Men always take the green food and the fish under their special protection at home. I suppose it is the same thing here."

After we had been seated at the table for a few minutes in a little stuffy room, adorned with a fine picture of Re Umberto and Queen Margherita—a dirty little room without one redeeming feature—the spry captain made his appearance, and with a magnificent salute he swung himself out of his cloak, cap, and sword.

A few boon companions came in and took their places beside him.

"The captain thinks it is his impertinent moustache I am admiring," Doris said; "he has twirled it and turned it a hundred times for my benefit. If he only knew that I am magnetised by the way the macaroni crawls down his throat! It is like some gigantic worm stretching from his plate to his mouth."

He was eating macaroni in the approved fashion. The fork is placed in the centre of a plate piled high with the stuff. You turn the fork round and round slowly, like the handle of a mill, bend your mouth to it, and draw it in! The Sicilian never stops till the long coil has disappeared, and I believe that the connoisseurs would tell you that it is as wrong to chew macaroni as it is to bite an oyster. No one speaks to the man at the macaroni mill.

Considering the place, our dinner was fairly good. Sicilians are born cooks when they can get anything worth cooking, and they can make as much out of nothing as most frugal nations.

The children of the landlady played cards with the captain and his friends during dinner. I fancy the handsome young fool enjoyed showing Doris how fond the little girl was of him. But, as Doris said, "In Sicily every feminine thing in petticoats is a woman and a flirt." This six-year-old child displayed as much knowledge of her femininity as a woman of thirty. Her dramatic gestures and her flashing almond eyes were woman's wiles. At six years old she had passed through babyhood and childhood.

After dinner our landlady asked us if we were satisfied, thinking that her charges would be very moderate, we could not but say yes. We wished her good-night, and received another gracious salute from the captain. I could almost excuse his languishing look at Doris as she smiled good-night in return. She stood so clean and fair in the smoke-begrimed little room; her very presence there was an absurdity. I am sure she is the first pretty Englishwoman who has graced this poor inn. We found our way down the dark stairs and across the cold, clean town square, where the men, in their

wind-blown high-peaked cloaks, looked like giant bats in the dark night. The sharp air caught our breath after the heat of the small restaurant, and we shivered; the thought of the cold dark monastery was not inviting.

We found our way along the narrow passage to the side door, where we expected to find a light to lighten our darkness; but none had been provided. In Castrogiovanni they do not consider it necessary to look after the comfort of their visitors.

I struck a match. It was the last, the last I possessed of that noble race of "Bryant & May's."

When the flame burnt out and left us in a more baffling darkness than before, we felt completely cut off from the civilised world. The death of that sturdy English match was the parting knell. We stumbled along the dark passages, feeling our way carefully, mindful of the Greek water-pitchers, and of the hole in the floor.

Somewhere in the darkness a Sicilian match was struck, and feebly spluttered into being. Doris instantly caught my arm. A hand from under a heavy cloak lit a sludge lamp, and a voice whined for money.

"If we give him any," she said, he might call again for some more in the middle of the night, and although the locks unlock twice, you need only kick once at the door to get your body through. Front doors are a convenience to a house, after all."

The whining voice still whined: "*Fáme, signorina, molto fáme.*"

When I refused the man money and told him to be off, the tone of his voice suddenly altered. He was a porter. "Might he come for our baggage next morning?" He was evidently convinced that

one night in such a place would be sufficient for us. I promised him our patronage and told him to go.

"I suppose the Greek pitchers are his pillows and his cloak is his blanket," Doris said, "for he has no intention of leaving the building."

The wind was blowing through a dilapidated roof, and the whole place was inconceivably desolate.

"Are you afraid?" I said. "We could go back to the restaurant and sit up all night. At least there is warmth there."

"No, I'm not exactly frightened," she said, "but it is rather draughty. It would never do to go back to the restaurant, for the landlady told me that these two rooms had been prepared especially for us, because we were English, and therefore would not care to share the common sleeping-room in the restaurant. She has one room there with twenty beds in it. Germans like it very much, she said, but the English are more *difficult*—they are less sociable."

"Castrogiovanni is cold," I said. "That is one thing to be argued in favour of the plan, and for another there is safety in numbers."

"Don't say such horrid things! We will be perfectly safe here; there is nothing to be afraid of."

The voice did not sound as brave as the words.

"I will lie awake all night," I said, "in any case. So try to sleep, and don't be nervous."

"Oh, I'm not nervous," she replied, a little haughtily, "only anxious. It would be very awkward to be kidnapped without one's clothes. It's so cold up here."

"I quite understand," I said. "But even a brigand in Sicily would give a lady time enough to

dress in cold weather. They have perfect manners."

The long day spent in the keen air got the better of my romantic determination to remain awake for her sake, and it seemed only a few minutes from the hour of our parting in the dark passage at ten o'clock at night till eight o'clock next morning, when I heard a fresh young voice, full of the courage and assurance of bright daylight, call out behind my door—

"No fleas and no brigands. I feel as fit as a fiddle. I have slept so soundly. *You must* be tired, poor thing, after having lain awake all night."

"Oh, I slept beautifully!" I said, forgetting altogether my promise of the night before. I heard a smothered laugh.

"Did you really? I wonder if Herr Mackintosh would have kept awake if Miss Rosina had been sleeping next door? I'm afraid you are not to be depended upon."

I was out of my room by this time, and I saw the laughter in her eyes.

"Supposing I had been too nervous to sleep," she said, "wouldn't it have been most ungallant of you to have been fast asleep next door?"

"You would never have known," I said. "I should not have been foolish enough to tell you."

"But I should have known all the same," she said, with quiet assurance. "You couldn't have deceived me."

"Have I such a very honest face?" I said. "Can you always read the truth in my eyes?"

A little blush warmed her cheeks.

"About your eyes I don't know," she said—"I never tried to read them; but I have been compelled to listen to your snores."

"Oh, Doris!" I said; "I'm certain that's not true. I never snore."

"No man or woman was ever yet honest enough to own that he or she snored," she said; "they'd rather confess to a murder. I wonder why?"

"Because it is difficult to love a person who snores," I said. "It is not a criminal offence, but it is very unromantic. Try to picture any great hero snoring, and he becomes commonplace at once."

"Napoleon must have snored," she said; "he had a snoring neck."

"Napoleon was a law unto himself," I said. "Even fatness and snoring could not have dimmed the halo of romance which surrounds him. When I hear people trying to define genius I simply say 'Napoleon.'"

"Snoring may not be romantic," she said, "but it sounds contented."

We hurried across the square to the restaurant. How welcome a cup of hot coffee would be! We took our seats at the table, which still retained the crumbs and tobacco-ash of the night before. The landlady appeared and placed two *scaldini* full of hot charcoal, on the table in front of us. We held our hands over the grated lids to thaw our benumbed fingers.

"It was a brave person who washed much this morning," Doris said. "I don't think I ever bathed my face in really cold water before. But what fun it all is!"

The *scaldini* were beautiful old copper goblets with four crossed brass handles over the top. After the coffee was served, the landlady brought her two children and stood watching us drink it. The little flirt of the night before was really a lovely child, the other was pale and heavy-eyed.

Doris invited the woman to sit down.

"She has already asked me a whole list of the usual questions," she said, with an amused smile. "The coach-driver has informed her of our relationship to each other. But now she wishes to know, How long have I been away from home? When am I going back? If I live in England?—which, in her mind, of course, means London. Are you married? Have you any children of your own? We can answer the questions just as we like, and she will repeat them to the fine captain to-night at dinner. It never seems to enter her head that we should tell her anything but the truth. But I will forgive her many things, for the coffee is excellent and fresh-made. It is a true saying about restaurants: that where a few men are gathered together there will the food be excellent, but where only a few women are to be found there will be no food at all. Women may dress to annoy other women, but they cook to please men. If a party of school-mistresses dined here every night in place of that long-sworded police captain and his subordinates, I should have been sorry for our chance of a dinner."

When we had finished our coffee we were not allowed to linger, for, punctual to the moment, our young friends showed themselves at the door. It was Sunday, a thing one is rather apt to overlook in a little town with no shops, and where the church bells do not wait for Sunday to ring. But the students had honoured the day by wearing gloves. We spent the morning in inspecting the ruins of the two ancient castles, and in admiring one or two fine palaces. But the sight which pleased us most was a pack of sleek black mules, harnessed in their Sunday-best. The straps and trappings were made of soft leather, richly embroidered and em-

bossed with red and yellow cloth; the saddle-bags were quite rich enough for drawing-room cushions. The faces of the animals were almost hidden in the elaborate wool harness and scarlet fringes; a copper bell rested on the forehead of each mule. In the cold, grey, silent streets this long procession of richly trapped mules made a strangely mediæval sight. They looked as though they had been cut out of Benozzo Gozzoli's frescoes. Doris was disappointed not to see a monkey seated on the hind-quarters of one mule and a nigger page following another, and the young Medici dominating the picture. The man in charge of the mules was equally pleased with our openly expressed admiration of the beasts and their harness. I don't know what they were going to carry, or where they were going to, but I suppose there was some purpose in their picturesqueness. They certainly gave us a good deal of pleasure, and they suited the place uncommonly well.

Carts and horses there are none in Castrogiovanni. But there are dogs, and the dogs of Castrogiovanni are like no mortal dogs you have ever seen. There can be no tax on dogs in Sicily, which is a pity; for even a tax of a *soldo* a head would put out of existence hundreds of these lank, cowering beasts. They belong to no known breed or kind, these shivering, starving mongrels, so debilitated through starvation or in breeding that they have not the pluck to run away if they are kicked. In a dirty town there is always some refuse for a dog to devour, but here there is no need for such street scavengers, for the wind carries all before it. Not the most vigilant microbe could find a hiding-place in this city in the clouds. These empty, meek-eyed dogs have neither guts enough

mafia is, in short, a king of terror, which governs Sicily with a despotic hand. No man's soul is his own; it belongs to the mafia. If he is told to commit a crime, he must commit a crime. And yet, by no means confuse it with anarchism; for these two evils are distinct, and work, I believe, on different methods. Both, however, unfortunately flourish. I do not believe that Sicily wishes to be wicked; it would be good if circumstances would allow it. The evil that it does is the result of wild desperation and misery.

Taken individually they are simple, lovable people, with the inherited good breeding of generations of men and women of gentle manners. I have not seen a brutalised woman in Sicily, but I have seen a desperate mother, who would murder a stranger to give food to her starving child. This is not brutality, but the wonderful thing God plants in the hearts of mothers at the birth of their first-born. Nor have I seen a drunken woman, nor heard a mother's voice raised in abusive anger. Can this be said of countries which are considered more civilised and advanced because they are free of brigands and the mafia?

But I have left Castrogiovanni. Living in the centre of the brigand country brought me to the subject of the mafia, which is of course subtly connected with brigandage, as it is with everything else that is worst in Sicily.

There is a museum in Castrogiovanni, which keeps its doors open all day long, and is guarded by no custodian or curator. This, I think, speaks well for the honesty of the citizens, as the room (which is dignified by the term museum) contains one object at least of great money value. It is a reredos of enormous size made of solid silver.

It represents the interior of a basilica, and the

vista of the high altar with the priest elevating the host is magnificently achieved. The ingenious way in which the pillars of the basilica stand out from the background gives the desired effect of distance to the high altar. The workmanship is, I fancy, sixteenth century. It is a pity it is not used in the cathedral now, for the effect would be magnificent with hundreds of candles lighting it up.

This enormous mass of silver stands in this solitary room, forgotten and totally unguarded. Perhaps you scarcely realise what the sight of so much silver means to a Sicilian, until you live in a country where a larger coin than a franc is not often passed in silver, and where a gold coin is never seen except in the hands of a foreigner. This reminds me of rather an interesting fact—the reason why there is so much difficulty in buying any of the beautiful old Italian jewellery—the delicate necklaces or long earrings threaded with real pearls which form part of the dowry of the Italian or Sicilian peasant-girl. There is so little gold in the Kingdom of Italy that the Government, anxious to retain all that there is, are wise enough to offer a very fair value in paper money for all the second-hand gold jewellery which comes into the market.

The peasant does not, therefore, sell his trinkets to the ordinary pawnbroker or dealer in antiques. He goes to the Government *Mont-de-piété* and deposits them there. Of course he does not get the real value of the article he is selling, taken from the point of view of what a Jew dealer would charge a stranger for the same article; but then, neither would he if he took it to the Jew dealer. There are always two prices for an article—the one you pay for it, and the one you sell it for. No doubt the Government treats the man as well, if not better, than the dealer would.

This jewellery is wonderfully beautiful. Doris priced a pair of earrings wrought in delicate gold tracery and threaded with fine seed pearls; some chips of rubies and emeralds formed a charming design in the centre. The pair were £15, nor would the dealer be persuaded to break the pair. Doris told him that English ladies would buy them separately, to be worn as pendants. He scoffed at this idea, and said that some poor Sicilian woman would save up the money and purchase the pair for her daughter's dowry.

On market days it is amusing to watch the country-women going into some small jeweller's shop to spend their hard-earned money on some piece of solid jewellery. I have seen earrings in Sicily quite large enough for Doris to wear on her wrists as bangles. Gold mixed with a little copper alloy is much thought of; the Sicilian does not care for the new Californian yellow gold. But the modern jewellery is very ugly. Heavy gold necklaces of inferior workmanship and poor designs have taken the place of the delicate gold tracery studded with uncut jewels and fringed with seed pearls. These old ornaments were things of such artistic beauty that it is difficult to imagine how the people of the present day can choose in preference the vulgar trinkets one sees displayed in the shop windows on market days. Why has their taste so degenerated?

It is a touching sight, this purchasing of the wedding jewellery. I have more than once seen a little family conclave, lasting the greater part of the day, taking place in some quiet jeweller's shop. A table is placed in the middle of the floor, and the family—which usually consists of three generations at least—take their places at it with an air of digni-

fied importance. The mother of the bride is draped in the usual fine black cashmere shawl, but the glossy head of her pretty daughter is of course hatless; her parents can afford to buy her some fine gold trinkets for her dowry, but she has not risen to the social position of wearing a hat. A bright scarf of many colours will be worn over her hair on the journey home.

The jeweller does not expect the party to hurry over their purchase; what has taken so long to save must not be spent too quickly. The whole shop is turned out for them to examine, although the article of their choice has been decided upon at home for some months past. Dear, simple people, no one is left out upon this important occasion. The old family servant is there, and so are one or two good neighbours. I can imagine the bare little Sicilian home made bright that night by the presence of the wonderful necklace.

* * * * *

Only too soon the hour came for us to say farewell to Castrogiovanni. It is sad to say good-bye to a beautiful place which you feel almost certain you will never visit again. Something in your life is slipping into the past, and one more memory is being added to the sanctuary. How many yesterdays there are, although to-morrow never comes! The disagreeable moment was upon us of paying the landlady. She had intentionally kept out of our sight until the very last moment. She brought no written bill, but asked "eight francs fifty" each per day.

Doris looked crestfallen, not on account of the eight francs, but that again our trust in these primitive people had been misplaced. We told her that she had refused to fix her price per day when

we arrived, and as we had eaten her food and slept in her comfortless rooms, we had no choice left but to pay the fee she demanded; but that five francs would have rewarded her liberally. She became aggressive, and whined for even more than eight francs. We must pay extra for the scrap of bread and cheese she had given us to eat on our journey. We were quite determined that we should not pay one cent more than the eight-and-a-half francs, and when she found that she could get nothing more out of us, she bowed and smiled and joined in the chorus of good wishes for our journey. We might have been her welcome guests instead of her overcharged customers. We were pleased to learn from the coachman that this woman was not a Sicilian, but a North Italian. He had apparently quite forgotten his own overcharge of the day before, for he explained that the North Italians are the Jews of Sicily.

“They despise the South,” he said, “and laugh at our poverty; but they come here, nevertheless, and take the food out of our mouths. That woman married the old man who showed you over the monastery when you arrived yesterday, for his money, and, *mio Dio!* what a life she leads him. But an old man is a fool who marries a young woman. Is that not so, signore? He deserves all he gets.”

When we laughingly reminded him of his own attempt to cheat us the day before, he shrugged his shoulders.

“At least I was not rude, signore,” he said; “and we must all try and make what money we can. He that is afraid of the devil does not grow rich.”

The day being warmer, he had thrown off his dark blue cloak, which seemed to hang on the outer

rim of his shoulders as if it were gummed there, as he strode down the mountain at a swinging pace. The horses had to go cautiously, for the hard frost of the night before had made travelling dangerous. We had, therefore, a fine opportunity of admiring his magnificent physique. Every nerve in his body seemed alert, and his figure was beautifully proportioned. He conveyed an impression of manliness and courage, which are not the attributes you would apply to the elegant loungers who decorate so picturesquely the cities in the plains.

As we were steaming out of the station rather a touching thing happened. A young soldier, who had his entire kit with him and was apparently going to join his regiment in some distant part of the island, was reading the *Giornale*. Doris had, I fancy, cast longing eyes at the paper for some news of the war. The young fellow looked up and caught the longing. He saluted gracefully and very diffidently offered her the paper.

“It contains good news of your war,” he said. “Please keep it to read on your journey.” He was a North-countryman from Bologna, and was greatly interested in South Africa. He was entirely in sympathy with the English. Of course we had to bear in mind that nothing succeeds like success. I wondered if six weeks ago he would have looked at it from the same point of view. However, the spirit of kindness which prompted the action was not lost upon Doris, and I think the young man was well repaid, for she has a way of smiling her thanks which nothing in uniform can resist, especially when the heart that beats below it is Italian.

I forgot to mention that in the centre of Castrogiovanni, which is the centre of Sicily and was the centre of the ancient worship of the Corn Goddess,

there is to-day a famous vineyard, which, as far as we could gather from Freeman, is the site of the renowned Temple of Proserpine. The site of the temple of her mother Ceres (for want of better evidence, as Freeman says) is accepted to be the big white rock which rises sheer from the plains outside the town beyond the Castle of Manfred. "From such a point Demeter (Ceres) could indeed look forth over her Island, and her Island could look up to its goddess. In the absence of all direct evidence, we may provisionally accept this site as that of the holiest place of pagan Sicily."

Speaking of Ceres and her child reminds me that in the small municipal museum spoken of, there was an interesting example of the tact and adaptability shown by the early Christians. There is an antique statue of the pagan mother and her child, Ceres with the infant Proserpine in her arms. The Christians, not wishing to upset local customs too quickly, used the same statue for Mary and the child Christ. There was both common-sense and economy in this simple transformation. The ancients no doubt had inherited from many, many generations a reverence and devotion for this statue. It had been made sacred by the prayers of thousands, and therefore what had served as the emblem of the holiest of pagan deities was wisely utilised to represent the mother and infant-founder of the new religion. This adaptation of pagan customs and pagan belongings enters into everything. The pagan festivals became the Christian saint-days; the pagan temples were used as Christian churches. It even went so far in Castrogiovanni that, to appease the people—because, no doubt through the worship of the old religion being thrown aside, the importance of Enna was considerably lessened—the local

leaders of the new religion invented the astounding theory that the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady took place in Enna. Visitors are shown a curious little stove in an ancient room which Mary is said to have inhabited. They even go so far as to say that Mary was engaged in cooking at this very stove when the announcing angel appeared to her. In robbing Enna of the worship of the pagan mother it seemed only just to make the handsomest compensation possible.

Freeman says : " There is no spot of an historic fame so ancient and so abiding as Enna which kept so few memorials of its earlier history. . . . Here and there we mark a wheel-track or a cutting in the rock, but it is disappointing that in a place so full of memories, Sikel, Greek, Roman, Saracen, and Norman, we can find nothing, no wall or temple or church or palace, older than the kings of the house of Aragon."

This of course to classical scholars must be a grievous fault in Castrogiovanni, but with Doris and myself it would be affectation to pretend that we felt very deeply upon the subject. The Aragon memories are good enough for us, Doris says ; and the Castrogiovanni of to-day is so picturesque and romantic that we can console ourselves for the loss of *Epoca Greca*. It is rather a relief to think that we have not seen one ancient tomb of a noble family in Castrogiovanni.

Doris was gaily chattering to our young student guides as they were toiling up to the vineyard, when two brown-frocked monks scuttled down the hill with upraised hands. They spoke so rapidly and so urgently that both the need and meaning of their eloquence was lost upon us. With crestfallen faces and polite apologies for the conduct of the monks,

the boys told Doris that she was on forbidden ground. No woman—not even Queen Margherita herself—was permitted to visit this vineyard or monastery.

“Then ask them *why* they have dared to plant their vineyard on one of the most sacred spots in pagan Sicily? Why may a woman not visit the ground ‘famous among the sanctuaries of the earth,’ when it was a woman who gave us her Son for the redemption of mankind?”

The monks gazed at her.

“Tell them to go away,” she continued, “and they are not to look at me. If it is wrong for a woman to walk in their beautiful vineyard it is wrong for them to stare at one just outside the gate.”

Of course I refused to enter. I did not feel inclined to put my hand in my pocket to purchase a bottle of wine, which would be expected of me, when Doris was refused admittance.

Doris had progressed so far in her acquaintance with the students of the university of Castrogiovanni that she had promised to send them a letter from Girgenti as a souvenir.

“They can’t read English and I can’t write Italian; my grammar is too shaky. I have learnt to do half my speaking with my hands and eyes, and you can’t put that down on paper; but it doesn’t matter in the least. They can imagine I have written just what they would like me to feel. What dear lads they are! One of them asked me if I liked poetry. He at once began reciting what I fancied might be a quotation from Dante which he had learnt at school. The other three boys clapped their hands, and told me that it was his own composition. No doubt it was rubbish, but even



A Temple at Girgenti.

[To face p. 164.]

Italian prose sounds like poetry, and the boy had a charming voice. Can you imagine an English schoolboy striking an attitude on a rock and bursting into poetry?"

It was evidently Doris who had inspired his muse, for the poem was only composed the night before.

As there are no women of even the humblest order to be seen in the streets of Castrogiovanni, and these boys had never been in any other city, you can imagine how their young hearts were fired by the pretty English girl, who walked and smiled and talked to them in a way which the girls of their country do not understand. How doubly cold and cheerless their university would be when the wonderful lady had gone! Their hearts had been surprised and stolen in one sunlit afternoon and a gay morning of blue skies and mountain heights, but all the years of a long life will not efface the vivid impressions of youth. You may be quite sure that in the days to come, when these bright-eyed boys are taking their places with the patriarchs of the grey old wind-blown city, in the memory of each of them there will be a green spot for the English girl with cheeks like their almond blossom.

When the bellissima signorina was mounted high on the top of the Regie Poste, and the horses were ringing an impatient peal with their fine necklaces of bells, four boys' hearts were very heavy, and eight dark eyes were full of sentiment and longing.

Their little souvenir at parting was a pretty collection of the wild-flowers of Castrogiovanni, exquisitely pressed and mounted on large sheets of exercise paper. They were flowers they had gathered for their botany lectures at the seminary. These little attentions, which are very usual in Sicily, have endeared the people very much to us.

I hope I do not gush to you over Sicily, and I am glad that my journal helps to beguile the weariness of your enforced idleness. You should come to Sicily to learn how to do nothing on no income. Here idleness becomes a dignified profession.

Yours affectionately,
J. C.

GIRGENTI, SICILY,
March, 1900.

DEAR LOUISE,—

Girgenti, the ancient Acragas, is marvellous : it soars above description. From our terrace of this most pleasing hotel, which is the strangest mixture of electric light and mediæval darkness, we look down upon a scene which suddenly brings you to your level. But to give you even the faintest idea of the view I have before me at this moment, I must tell you that Girgenti, the city, is built upon a hill ; but, speaking broadly, the Girgenti which visitors come to see consists of the Greek temples which lie down on the plain. Our hotel is up in the city, which has adapted its outlines to the natural formation of a long line of rock which runs along the crest of the hill. Our hotel is almost the last house on the outermost rim of the city, so that nothing interrupts our view of the wide, fertile plain which runs down to the sea—a plain literally flowing with wine and oil, although the vegetation which shows up most impressively here, and which casts a veil of misty blue over the landscape, consists of the inevitable artichokes and the prickly-pears.

On well-chosen sites of considerable elevation, midway between the sea and the line of mountains, lie the famous temples of Girgenti.

Strangers should time their arrival in Girgenti so that their eyes may first fall upon these eternal

monuments when they are bathed in the warmth of the setting sun. The sun seems to rejoice in the part it is called upon to play in enhancing the beauty of these proofs of Sicily's pagan greatness.

It would have been rude if it had set behind the great city rock and left the temples out in the cold. As Doris says, "All you can do is to conquer tears and bow your head in meek humility when you first see these temples. There is nothing else to be done." There are some kinds of architectural scenery which you can speak about and rave over, but these mighty monarchs of the plain command the respect of silence.

Even a fool's tongue could not wag when the light which brings long shadows falls upon the place, and pours its evening blessing upon the temples. These temples are the saddest things I have ever seen. Alone in their strength, they have outlived the history of their time. They represent a religion of which we know nothing and have but the merest suppositions. The innumerable images and lamps and votive offerings found in their precincts do not help us. There they stand—these sanctuaries of the pagan world—dominating the plain in their simple greatness, forgotten by Time, the ravager, like some lonely souls passed over in the day of judgment. And yet in their day they were the focus in the life of a people—a people who were counted amongst the great, a people who were busy colonising the desirable Mediterranean shores.

One cannot help being thankful that there are cathedral archives to record the history of the Christian belief, so that when another twenty centuries have effected their ruthless changes, Canterbury will not be a monument to an unknown religion.

* * * * *

We are the only strangers in this wonderful hotel, and our host (the *maître d'hôtel*) is a Sicilian edition of Corney Grain. He walks with the same elephantine gentleness, and besides having a unique resemblance in figure and features, he has something of the late lamented's grace of wit. It would be useless to attempt to describe this hotel, for surprises greet you at every turn. Sufficient that it gives you a happy impression of white-tiled terraces, gaily adorned with green pots full of red carnations in a riot of bloom, tangles of cacti and Fichi d'India, and has elevations of every conceivable height and construction. When a Sicilian requires another room or a terrace, he builds it on. His native ingenuity always defies impossibility, and never a spot is wasted where a flower or a green thing will flourish.

On our arrival, after introducing us to his wife, who, poor creature, is one of those yellow objects devastated by fever which one sometimes sees in Sicily, our host escorted us to the terrace which overlooks the plains. He is a giant of few words, and as we followed him up the tiled staircase, cool and dark, and across the light, white halls, brightly tiled, we felt that we had dropped down upon something good. After Castrogiovanni it seems luxurious. Without a word spoken we seemed to journey on through an endless succession of dark passages and Spanish tiled halls, when quite suddenly he opened a door and bowed Doris out on to the sunny terrace. I watched his pleased face while the girl took in her first impression of the view.

Doris leaned her elbows on the parapet of highly glazed china tiles, and shaded her eyes from the evening sun.

"I am finding the temples," she said; "I know they are down on the plain."

Our gentle giant did not speak, but with a soft white hand he pointed out their situation with his eyes still fixed on the girl's eloquent face. After a moment's looking, she raised her elbows from the white tiles, and her hands dropped at her side. She had seen them! We stood in devout silence. A tired sigh came from full heart to lips. She left us and walked to the end of the terrace. It was as if some gorgeous music, which had held her spell-bound and as physically taut as the strings of a fiddle, had suddenly ceased.

Our host gave an approving smile of sympathy. I could see he was pleased, and that it was here as it is everywhere,—Love me, love my Sicily. Scorn my Sicily, and you may sleep in north rooms and eat poor food for all I care.

"The signorina is affected," he said. "She is very sensitive. The English are not often so."

I nodded my head.

"I often wonder why it is that the signor Inglese travels so far from the country which is the best in the world?"

I smiled at his implied sarcasm.

"For something to do," I said; "and in search of sunshine."

He laughed. "*Già, già.* We are all sun-worshippers whatever our creed may be; that is the touch of nature which makes us all kin. Is not that so? The English are so powerful that they take whatever they wish, but they cannot rob Italy of her sunshine. It is like the rich man who can buy everything but love, and love is the salt of life. A country without sunshine requires all its riches." And then he went on to point out the different temples by their names.

The Temple of Juno Lacinia, the Temple of Concord, the Temple of Hercules, the Temple of

Jupiter, the Temple of Castor and Pollux, these are the most important of the group of nine, and fine-sounding names they were when they rolled from the lips of Orestes de' Angelis. The ancient Porto Empedocle, which carried on such a wealthy trade with Carthage when the inhabitants of Acragas numbered eight hundred thousand (including slaves), lies stretched out in the blue sea. The boats swaying in the harbour, he explained, were now almost entirely confined to the sulphur trade. One-sixth of the Sicilian sulphur is exported from this little port.

"Signor de' Angelis," Doris said suddenly, "will you order a carriage now, at this very moment, before the sun goes away? for we must go to the temples. I want to sit in one this very evening. They can never be so beautiful again."

"While you drink your coffee, signorina, on the terrace, I will do what you command."

The coffee appeared, and also some tangerine oranges, half-hidden in their dark green leaves. I think you have to go to Sicily to see these rich-coloured oranges. I have never found them elsewhere.

"We have not inspected our rooms yet," I said, "or made any arrangements."

"I don't care the least bit where I sleep. I feel as if to sleep here would be a waste of time, a want of proper appreciation. Let us forget all the little bothers of travelling and go to the temples. You can order your rooms any time, but you can't order that light."

Once in the carriage we dashed with a fine recklessness through the long *córsó*, sending the hordes of idle loungers flying hither and thither. If a coachman in Sicily waited for the populace to move out of the horses' way, you would never reach your

destination. You have to run over them to make them move. The road to the temple skirts the foot of the Rock of Athene, where the temple of Athene is supposed to have stood, and passes the fashionable Hôtel des Temples, and later the dilapidated but picturesque Convent of St. Nicola.

Girgenti and its surroundings are red—as red as Devonshire; Syracuse and its neighbourhood were dazzlingly white, and Castrogiovanni was grey. In Girgenti rich travertine walls take the place of the white plastered walls so general in Syracuse. On this long road to the temples these orange-walls have undoubtedly been built mainly from blocks stolen from the ruined temples. On this road we met our first flock of Girgenti goats, which are the aristocracy of their race in Sicily, and do a great deal to impress upon you the magnificence of the animal at its best.

They are enormous beasts with long and very fine snow-white hair; their immense horns stand out from their heads like the antlers of a stag. Under the shade of an ancient prickly-pear, which had grown so strong that its trunk was as thick and as straight as a tree, a sunburnt old man was busily feeding half a dozen of these fine goats. Their eager, pert heads seemed almost human in their intelligence as they waited for him to cut a slice off a succulent leaf of the prickly-pear which he held in his hand. Before the slice had left the pocket-knife or had been quite severed from the leaf, a sharp mouth seized it and a blunt nose was poked into the air; then another and another mouth was fed in just the same manner. The man was a beautiful old country fellow, dressed in the light-blue cotton knee-breeches and loose coat, the costume of a generation which is fast dying out.

The group made a charming picture. Girgenti



“The Temple of Castor and Pollux at Girgenti.”

[To face p. 172.]

is full of colour. The little black-and-white goats of Syracuse are very insignificant animals compared with these white ones.

Here, as everywhere, we have goats and prickly-pears. The *tombs*, I am quite sure, we are coming to.

The prickly-pears are the camels of Sicily. They carry water during the drought for the beasts in their fleshy leaves, and absorb moisture out of the barren soil. The human boy and foolish lovers do not carve their names or cut entwined hearts on the bark of trees in Sicily, but on the broad plate-shaped leaves of the prickly-pear. I have seen poems and amusing mottoes cut on these ubiquitous plants, and not infrequently caricatures of local celebrities are cleverly scratched on them.

Here in Girgenti there are fields and mountain-sides covered with this weird plant. The prickly-pear is green-blue, while the aloe is blue-green, and yet neither of them is really green at all when it takes its place beside the true spring-green of the almond-trees or the tender sprouting grain, the green which England knows and loves. The charm of the vegetation in the south is, I think, due to the mixtures of these different greens. Here the asphodels are still in bloom. Syracuse is much earlier in the arrival of her seasons.

When we reached the temples they were still warm with the sun. They are built of a shell-stone or travertine, which never could have withstood the ravages of the sirocco if they had not been originally covered with an imperishable white cement, which can be seen to this day in parts.

If these temples had been built of marble or of any valuable stone, it is doubtful if they would have withstood the ravages of Hannibal, the son of Gisco, who plundered the city in 406 and shipped off its

works of art to Carthage. Even the temples were burnt. Poor Juno still carries her scars.

Doris refuses to picture them as they were in their original state, cemented white to represent marble and decorated in bright colours. They are so much more beautiful now. It was the desire of the Greeks, no doubt, to reproduce in their colonies the white marble temples of their beloved Athens which led them into this grievous error of imitation.

Out of the nine temples, two remain almost complete—the Temple of Juno Lacinia, and the Temple of Concord, which is one of the most perfect ancient temples in existence. Its preservation may be partly due to the fact that it was used as a Christian church throughout the Middle Ages. In the evening, when the hasty tourists have fled, and the Americans are dressing for their *table d'hôte* at the Hotel des Temples, it is sublime to sit almost hidden from sight in a sweet-scented sea of asphodels and gaze on these wonderful works of mankind. As you look, you grow amazed that human hands, and not divine, raised them. The huge fallen blocks impress you almost as much as the exquisite proportion and symmetry of the buildings. The scene envelops you. You find your mind battling to find out something of their past, battling to reconstruct them; your imagination, filled with classically draped figures, going through a form of ceremony, which is the stone wall against which your brain kicks, and it falls back to take refuge in the eye-worship of the present.

Why, you ask yourself, are all these ghosts of the past here to-day? They are little in keeping with the present city of Girgenti. Their simplicity and purity of style have served nothing as an example to the architects who built the cathedral.

The town, however, I must leave for another

time. To-night we have eyes only for the temples on the plains.

Have I told you that I have had news of Alice's boy? I am to expect a visit from him in Palermo. His ship is now at Malta. He has six months' leave, and speaks in his letter as if he intended spending the first three months in Sicily and Southern Italy. I cannot believe that Alice's boy is old enough to be writing in this manner. It seems impossible, when one looks back upon the pleasure and pain of those days, that the years have slipped by unnoticed so easily.

In youth we imagine each year and day will drag on in longing and loneliness. If there is anything of his mother in the lad, you may be sure, for old memories' sake, he will be welcome.

Yours,
J. C.

GIRGENTI,
March, 1900.

MY DEAR LOUISE,—

We are longing for English letters and London newspapers. It seems months since we left Syracuse. Our journey here took us through the heart of the sulphur-mining country, the Black country of Sicily, so to speak, although it is in reality yellow. As the train laboured through the mountains, the very air was thick with sulphur fumes, and for many miles the wild beauty of the scenery was ruined by the ever-present sulphur mines. I have not the slightest idea how these mines are worked, but their appearance is like the throwing up of gigantic mole-hills discoloured with sulphur. Everywhere on the winding goat-tracks through the mountainous mining country, you can see pack-trains of mules laden with gigantic blocks of yellow-green sulphur. Two blocks of, I should say, 50 lbs. each go to a mule.

The railway stations on the line are very numerous and close together, and it was always the same thing—a great deal of shunting and waste of time for us, spent in the hitching on or off of waggons full of sulphur. All the stations were busy with sulphur-coloured people taking the blocks from the mules and putting them into the waggons. When the sulphur arrives at Girgenti it is taken straight down by a special railway to Porto Empedocle. This busy, mining Sicily is a very ugly one, I must admit; and the people connected with it, the men,

women, and even the children, are as lawless and depraved a class of people as miners everywhere are. Yet the prosperity of Sicily depends on her sulphur. When sulphur is up, Sicily is peaceful, and socialism is inactive; when sulphur is down, Sicily is one vast home of paupers, and the terror of brigandage reigns.

It has come as an unpleasant shock in our travels through this idle island, this busy region of brimstone and sulphur. And yet to fully understand Girgenti and the undercurrent of discontent and the revolutionary spirit of the people, you must first grasp the magnitude of the sulphur trade, and see this extraordinary country where the daily life of the people is a thing undreamt of in its hideousness.

The wealth, and the poverty, and the horrible degradation of Girgenti are all the outcome of sulphur. The busy shipping, down at the little port in the blue African sea, is, as I told you, totally confined to sulphur. The railway which takes it down from the height of the city-on-the-hills to the sea-level—as fine a piece of engineering as there is of the kind—was constructed out of the profits of sulphur. The handsome corso, with its excellent shops and fine public buildings, is the outcome of sulphur; so, too, are the filthy depravity and bestial types of the men and women living in the foul-smelling streets behind the corso.

There is a sense of evil and wickedness, mingled with the poverty, in the dark streets of Girgenti which, thank God, is unusual amongst the poor of Sicily.

Doris could not walk alone through even the openest part of this wild city, whereas in Syracuse or Castrogiovanni she would have been as safe in the darkest corner as in her English village.

Our first experience of Sicilian drunkenness, too, has been at Girgenti. Our coachman who drove us to the temples on the night of our arrival was just drunk enough to be unpleasantly obstinate, and the noise in the streets here at night sounds more like the noise one hears when closing hour comes in London than the usual midnight talk and laughter in a Southern city. Sicily never goes to bed, and if you want to see the streets at their gayest, put your head out of your bedroom window some night after you have been asleep for many hours, and you will see the nation at play. I believe the beggars sleep when they have nothing to eat, but the shopkeepers, who are busy in their shops during the daytime, play dominoes or cards all night long, and it is a well-known fact that no Italian or Sicilian officer requires a night-shirt. His bright blue cloak and gleamings of scarlet and steel decorate the public squares and streets from dawn until dawn. Doris says she supposes that the reason why Italians have no word for home is that they used to live in their palaces and now live in their streets. No one could ever call a palace a home, were it ever so palatial.

Speaking of palaces reminds me that I have never told you anything about the interior of this hotel, which, it is needless to say, was once a palace. In days gone by there seems to have been literally no merchant class in Sicily; a man either lived in a palace or a basso, which is really the basement of a palace. Our gentle giant attends to our wants himself during meals; he keeps a waiter to run his messages. His manner is a subtle mixture of the dignity of a host and a humble anxiety for our comfort, and his cooking is superb; even the beef and mutton have here redeemed their fallen character. The decorations of the rooms are a ludicrous

mixture of ancient splendour and modern trash; the high vaulted roofs in the original palace rooms are handsomely painted, and there are some fine specimens of old Italian furniture scattered about the place. The immense sofas, covered in Genoese gold-brocade, seem dwarfed by the vastness of the rooms. Contrasted with these relics of bygone splendour are the most modern and rickety of wardrobes and make-shift washstands. The floors are covered with old Spanish tiles in yellow and blue. As many as thirty tiles go to form one design. In the new rooms, which the landlord has added on to the palace at his own sweet will, the walls are roughly distempered, and bold shafts of flowers and fruit are dashed across the white walls. These shafts of colour fly out from the cornice and disappear into the skirt-board. They are not the most original form of decoration I have ever seen, but the whole effect is delightfully Southern.

Four priests dined with us to-night, and although it is Lent they treated themselves well. Doris says that Lent is the only time when men are willing to own that they are over sixty—Catholics over sixty and under sixteen are exempt from fasting in Lent; so are all school-teachers, I believe, which is a very wise rule. The priests, like ourselves, are pilgrims in Girgenti, and are anticipating their first visit to the temples to-morrow morning. They are very clean in their persons, and polished men of the world in their manners. I wonder what country produced them.

This morning we paid a visit to the cathedral. In the Middle Ages Girgenti was the most richly endowed bishopric in Sicily, but there is little to remind you of the fact to-day in the tawdry modern building, the very acme of bad taste. The decorations of the interior remind one of a box covered

with shells, such as you see for sale on the pier at Brighton. It is impossible to get over the fact that the people who built this monument of vulgarity must have lived all their lives within sight of the Greek temples. The only part of the original building which remains is the elegant unfinished campanile and one pillar in the interior. Everything is squalor and disorder in Girgenti when once you leave the fine corso.

On the wide flight of steps leading up to the cathedral front, an entire household's washing was spread out to dry; some splendid coarse linen sheets, hand-spun and as warm as blankets in texture, were actually steaming on the hot red sandstone steps. This washing so completely usurped the main entrance to the building that two priests, who were scuttling to midday service, were compelled to go round to the side doors. In Girgenti it is impossible to enjoy a quiet moment. Sight-seeing is almost dangerous, for the people are both rough and rude. If a stranger appears in their streets most quietly and unnoticeably dressed, the human boy spots him at once, and he becomes a laughing-stock and an object of prey to the whole neighbourhood. Ugly little faces, covered with scars, turn their evil eyes up to yours, a general whine for money begins and increases in persistence as the string of followers gathers and gathers. No one is ashamed to beg in Girgenti. Sometimes I think they do it for fun and to annoy the stranger.

An old woman, whose features were wasted and distorted with disease, was actually laid out on a rough chaff-mattress in the narrow dark street to beg. As her bed took up the whole width of the street, we had to retrace our steps; we had no time to risk the army of microbes we might have disturbed by treading on that mattress. Her daughter

—a fine-featured, well-dressed woman—followed us with the endless cry, “*Fáme, signore, fáme, molto fáme, piccola monéta.*” I wonder if the sulphur kings of Sicily do anything for Girgenti. It is certainly a disgrace to their country, a blister on the side of the island. The ordinary tourist, who spends one night at the Hôtel des Temples, which is more than a mile from the city, never sees this degradation and poverty, for the cathedral in the city is scarcely worth a visit in a country where there is so much to see, although it contains a celebrated sarcophagus, which is a thing of rare and exquisite beauty, but not unique enough to tempt the ordinary sightseer out of his course. For, after a few months spent in Sicily, one begins to class sarcophagi in the same category as aqueducts and tombs of noble families. The only other object of interest in the town itself is what remains of the oldest temple of Girgenti, Jupiter Polieus. There are six columns still to be seen under the foundation of the church of S. Maria dei Greci.

But I have no intention of spending another hour of our valuable time in the city of Girgenti. You can so easily turn your back upon all that is evil and hideous by walking as far as the popular *Passeggiata*, which is at the extreme end of the town, just under the Rupe Atenea. This promenade commands a lovely view. We saw the distant island of Pantellaria an hour before sunset as we were sitting there listening to the town band. Sicilians live for their *Passeggiata*; it is the one event of excitement in their empty day. Girgenti does not boast of many “carriage folk,” so we had a near view of the beauty and fashion of this sulphur city, and we came to the conclusion that the merchant, or mine-owner, who is even moderately well off, does not live in Girgenti. It is strange what characters

cities have ! I wonder more has not been made of the subject in literature. Girgenti has as much individuality as any "cussed vixen" in fiction. If you were a blind person, and had been suddenly transported from Castrogiovanni to Girgenti the characteristics of the city would affect you at once. You could never imagine you were in sea-bound Syracuse, lovely white Syracuse, or wind-swept Castrogiovanni, with her silent streets and hurrying clouds. And yet here in Girgenti the cloud effects are magnificent. They tear and scud across the sky, casting deep shadows on the endless expanse of sea, which reaches as far from right to left, when you are facing the south, as the eye can see. There is something tragic about the scenery of Girgenti, something mysterious in the effect it has upon one. "You would always stand in awe of its beauty," Doris says, "even if you had played as a baby around its temples; it is not a place to love and grow fond of. Some places, like some people, command respect, while others beget love." Sicily is all gold and grey, all sunshine and shadow, but I think the shadows rest longest on Girgenti.

We wished to walk to the temples yesterday, having had not too pleasant an experience with our driver; and, to vary the route, we decided to follow the ancient Greek road which leads down to Porto Empedocle. We engaged the services of a small boy to act as guide. He was about twelve years of age, and as pretty a character as you ever saw; it was his extraordinary appearance which first attracted Doris. Not a garment he wore had originally been made or bought to fit his slender person. The boots on his small, well-shaped feet, which were stockingless, were women's boots, so many sizes too large for him that over and over again, as we picked our way through the ancient

rock-strewn street, one or both boots would be left lodged between the sharp stones. His trousers had literally no legs, they were all seat, and had originally been wore by some man as big as our gentle giant at the hotel; the upper portions reached almost to the child's ankles, so legs were not required. A coat of many colours, which had been made smaller round the tails and left in its original baggy state at the shoulders, was set off by a glaring knitted waistcoat, which came down almost to the knees. The cap, the faded ghost of what had once been fine green plush, was the only article of dress which, in a manner, fitted this grotesque little human ragbag. The boy's natural grace of limb and Greek cast of features made him look like a Greek mounteback playing at being a man, a thing all tatters and remnants, but graced with the beauty of the South. His hair had faded with the sun from nut-brown to tawny gold; the long ends were full of colour. But it was the eyes, full of the gravity of Sicily, and the eloquent languor of his race, which gave the real beauty to the face.

When we met him, his arms were full of fresh dandelions, which he told us he was taking home to his mother for a salad. Sicilians love green food, and Providence has been kind in supplying them with a plentiful variety of hedge salads, as any price, however low, would be more than they could afford to pay for garden-grown food. This says a good deal for their poverty: a landlady once told me that she could buy enough lettuces to serve a party of thirty for twopence.

We offered the boy twenty cents if he would act as our guide for the afternoon; he was delighted. Without a moment's thought, his fine salad was stowed inside his waistcoat; he was not the proud

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We offered the boy twenty cents if he would act as our guide for the afternoon; he was delighted. Without a moment's thought, his fine salad was stowed inside his waistcoat; he was not the proud

possessor of a shirt, so the evening salad lay for two long hours pressed close to his proud breast.

“ His costume, made up of other people’s rags,” Doris said, “ reminds me of a little dressmaker I employ at home. She dresses herself entirely on the old clothes her customers give her. I met her one day in deep mourning, and, as she was looking very pensive, I expressed my hopes that she had not lost any near relative.

“ ‘ Oh no, miss, thank you,’ she said. ‘ Mrs. Johnes has just gone out of crape and I am making her second mourning; these were the weeds she wore for her husband.’

“ I suppose that others people’s crape is very depressing, which accounted for the pensive expression, or perhaps she thought a widow’s weeds demanded a suitable sorrow.”

As the boy ran on in front of us, shuffling in and out of his shoes, and carrying Doris’ heavy cloak in his young arms, he turned round to smile a smile of grateful thanks at short intervals. After a toilsome walk, we left the ancient road and rejoined the modern carriage-road. When we reached the convent of St. Nicola, the woman in charge of the place, who acts as a guide, refused the boy admittance; indeed, she looked upon us as very doubtful visitors for having permitted this little street Arab to escort us.

“ He is a fresh-air Arab, at any rate,” Doris said, “ and he doesn’t smell a bit; that sunburnt skin and bleached hair are not suggestive of dark streets and stuffy rooms.”

The convent is desolate and picturesque. The very bad oranges, of which we partook while seated on the high terrace, which commands a beautiful view of the temples, grow in wanton waste in the neglected garden. The heavy scent of freesias and

heliotrope filled the air, and an immense stone-pine threw a shadow over the garden like a wide-spread umbrella. These magnificent trees stand like sentinels in the lonely Sicilian landscape; they become irrevocably a part of the country in one's memory.

There is a beautiful white marble frieze of Greek workmanship, which acts as a cornice to the high white terrace in the garden. No one knows its history, where it came from, or why it is there now. The ruined chapel is now a night-shelter for some fine peacocks and guinea-fowls; the former kept whisking open their tails for our pleasure, like a lady opening and shutting her fan. Doris said, "I wonder if they expect a tip, like everything else in Girgenti? Perhaps it is their form of begging." Outside the convent, sitting on the steps under the fine old Norman doorway, were the ubiquitous vendors of antiques.

Here it is *Antichità*, *Antichità*, all day long, for Girgenti is a paradise for the eager collector. At every step you are molested by beggars, who draw from their pockets small packets of much-defaced coins wrapped up in alarmingly dirty paper; the greater portion of these coins are valueless, and of no beauty, although they are undoubtedly genuine. But there are grades of coin vendors and sellers of *antichità*.

There are three dignified brothers, for instance, alike as three peas in a pod, who are licensed excavators. They are as tall and thin and as dark-haired and sunburnt as Arabs, and as gentle-voiced as women. The Government, being too poor to do much excavating in Sicily, and there being so much excavating still to be done, has devised the plan of permitting these fellows to search for antiquities by themselves in certain parts round Girgenti, under

cauliflowers, embedded in their green leaves, are even more charming. It seems as if the South could not get enough colour into her landscape, but she must needs give her vegetables rich purples and blues. Artichokes never grow to a great height in Sicily, but their leaves are much finer and have more colour in them than they have in England; they have usurped the place in the landscape which a few weeks ago was given over to fennel. Fennel is the Sicilian celery, and is even more an article of common food in every household in Sicily than potatoes are at home. I think, to fully appreciate Sicily, you must enjoy her fennel and delicious artichokes; the latter are cooked in every conceivable way, and for some months of the year no dinner is complete without them.

This afternoon Doris received a letter from the young students in Castrogiovanni. It is most amusing and untranslatable. What is graceful and pretty in Italian sounds absurd in English, especially when you associate it with a schoolboy of fifteen.

This is the last I shall write to you from Girgenti. We leave for Palermo the day after to-morrow. Our little world—Doris' and mine—will be shared by others then. We have not seen a fellow-countryman or woman since we left Syracuse, for we have chosen the hour for enjoying the temples when the occupants of the *Hôtel des Temples* are in their rooms dressing for dinner, and of course the one-day tourist to Girgenti has no time for other sights.

It is a mistake to go to the principal hotel in any place. You pay the top price and receive the cheapest courtesy. The native inn, unfrequented by foreigners, reveals another Sicily to you. The landlord, who is your host and cook, is unfailing

in his efforts to please you, while the waiters and servants smile on you and bless you for a quarter of the tip you would dare to give their more exalted brothers at the Hôtel des Temples. In all the excursions we have made, we have invariably chosen to take our meals at native restaurants in preference to those patronised by our fellow-countrymen.

Yours,
J. C.

PALERMO,
March, 1900.

DEAR LOUISE,—

Alas! we are back in a city of flats, plate-glass windows, and electric cars, and an opera-house large enough to meet the requirements of New York. Palermo is sheltered, or thinks itself sheltered (we have already felt its hot wind), by the beautiful pink Monte Pellegrino, which holds the shrine of Santa Rosalia, the patron girl-saint of the city.

The famous grotto of Santa Rosalia, where the youthful devotee (the niece of the good Norman king, William the Second) is supposed to have performed her devotions when she fled from the gay world to the mountains, is a popular pilgrimage place; it is visited by thousands of devout worshippers throughout the year.

It is difficult to give you a correct impression of Palermo. It is woefully disappointing at first sight, so altogether different from what we had expected it to be. Perhaps we have been too quickly transported from the *Epoca Greca* of Girgenti to have found our feet as yet in modern noisy Palermo, for so far we have not shaken off our first impression that Palermo is a little capital trying its best to keep pace with the big capitals of Europe.

If it were not an ambitious capital, Palermo would be enchanting; but, being a capital, the narrow old streets, with their glorious Sicilian Gothic palaces and cool courtyards, are thrust into the background by the wide modern boulevards, open to the merciless sun and wind, with these ambitious blocks of mansions which contain many flats.

How have the mighty fallen in Palermo, when to-day Sicilian princes, whose Norman palaces were once fortresses, garrisoned by private retainers, cast longing eyes at the five-roomed flats, with sleeping accommodation for one servant! When hundreds of fine palaces are standing empty in the city, it seems a little difficult for the ordinary stranger to find a reason or the necessity for erecting these flats in Palermo. But the Sicilian would dearly love to have his capital considered a gay, giddy, go-ahead-dog of a city.

And, indeed, Palermo is *quite* a city (as Miss Rosina would say), with fashionable streets, where goats would not dare to tread. In the new boulevards and in the noisy Via Macqueda, where you cannot hear yourself for the clang, clang, clanging of the electric-car bells and the rattling of the cabs over the cobble-paved streets, you are indeed far removed in spirit and atmosphere from the poetry and mystery of Sicily.

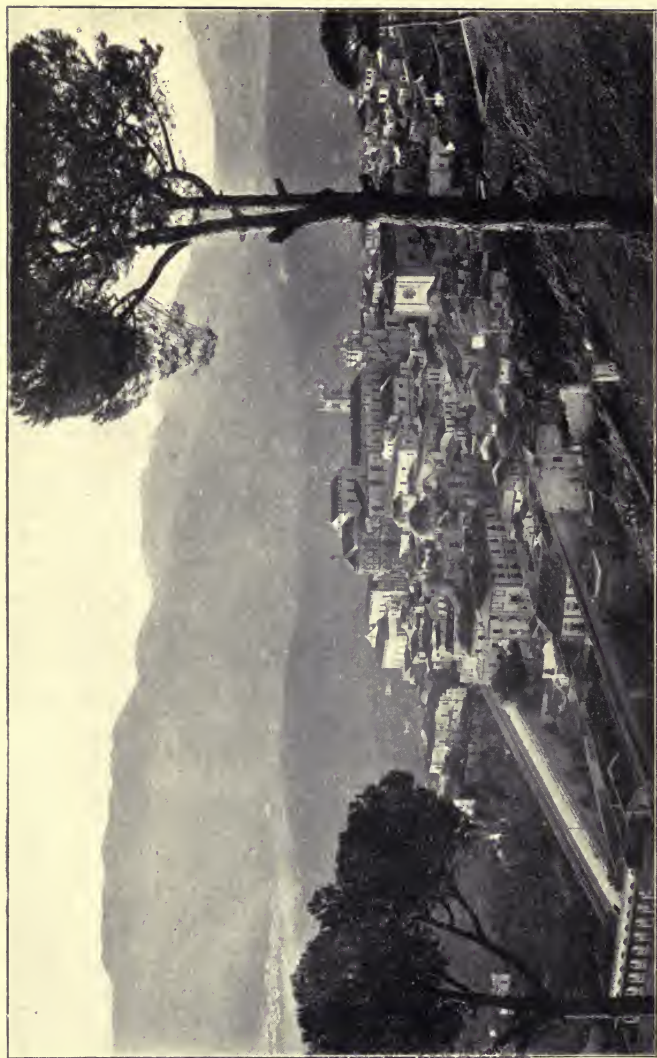
Two main streets, the Via Macqueda and the Corso Vittorio Emanuele, divide the city into four quarters. At the meeting of the four half-streets there is a small octagonal-shaped piazza. It is called the Quattro Canti, and has four elaborate Spanish fountains to decorate its corners. This piazza is the very centre of Palermo, and, I think,

it might be called the heart of Sicily. I am sure it is the incubator of most of her iniquities. From morning till night, and during the night more than at any other time, this piazza is crowded with idle loafers, over-dressed young men, scowling socialists, excited politicians, and anxious financiers. The noise of the gay splashing fountains is drowned by the ever-increasing babel of voices.

I do not like the Quattro Canti, or the Via Macqueda, or the Corso Vittorio Emanuele, or the Via Cavour, for they are typical of the Sicily of to-day, which does not inspire you with a respect or admiration for the nation. How detestable the black-coated young men, with their degenerated physiques, are to us after the splendid fellows of the mountains! and the hats, decked with cheap feathers and cotton flowers, on the heads of the young girls tell their story only too plainly.

In these gay streets, where the impertinently moustached youths hustle you off the narrow foot-paths if you are old, and openly ogle you if you are young and fair, you have to devote your attention so entirely to the task of keeping your footing and edging your way through the struggling crowds, that you dare scarcely lift your eyes from the ground. This is a pity, for at the end of almost every street in Palermo you can see blue mountains soaring into a bluer sky. These beautifully outlined mountains ring themselves round and shelter the famous *Conca d'Oro*. This "golden shell," as the fertile plain is so poetically called, is one of the Edens of Sicily.

Viewed from the height of the little town of Monreale, famous the world over for its mosaic-lined cathedral, it is easy to understand why the term *La fellce* was given to Palermo. The shel-



“ Viewed from the height of the little town of Monreale, famous the world over for its mosaic-lined cathedral.”
[To face p. 192.]

tered city stretches its arms from the blue sea to the fruitful golden shell; it is to be hoped that it will not open its arms too far, for the *Conca d'Oro* is the golden setting of this jewel city.

The Sicilian capital has undoubtedly an unrivalled situation; the Bay of Palermo is a professional beauty, like Sydney Harbour; it is considered by many to be as beautiful as the Bay of Naples, but in a less dramatic fashion. Of course Pellegrino is not Vesuvius, but this pilgrim mountain has a strange beauty of its own, and an important historic interest attaching to it which casts a shadow of romance over the bay. It was here that Hamilcar, nicknamed the Thunderbolt (father of the great Hannibal), settled with his soldiers and held out against the Romans for three years; nor in the end was he starved out, but he left his precipice of his own free will to drop his thunderbolt on Eryx, another of the rock cities of Sicily. The colossal pink rock of Pellegrino does not look to-day as if it were capable of having raised corn sufficient to supply the garrison of Hamilcar for three years, but history relates that it nobly rose to the occasion, and Cicero, in his impeachment of Verres constantly refers to Sicily being the granary of Europe. On the opposite side of the bay is Monte Catalfano, a long, low line of hills gently stretching far out to sea.

The view from the Marina is beautiful. Doris and I love to turn our backs on the busy streets and idle there, anticipating the appearance of Etna, which is promised to us on the first clear day; for Sicily without Etna is not Sicily, when once you have lived under that dominating presence.

The Marina in the warm summer nights is the popular rendezvous of all Palermitans. Great

stories we are told of the gay scenes which take place there in the languorous warmth of June and July. Ices and cool drinks of every variety are sold on the Marina from sundown until the day breaks, and eaten and drunk in alarming numbers by the parched citizens who sit on their white Marina close to the sea, longing for the cooler hours which come between the fading of the stars and the rising of the sun.

Of course the town band plays while the lovers linger and the midnight ices are eaten. Where the poor fellows get their wind from I do not know, but a town band must play in Sicily even if it is too hot for a cricket to sing. Night in a Southern city is a wonderful thing ; soft air and softer glances play the mischief with a man's morals, and there are so many idle hands to keep Satan busy that one feels quite sorry for the poor devil.

At this time of the year the popular *Passeggiata* is on the Corso Vittorio Emanuele which ends at the Marina, so that if the day is unusually warm the drive may be continued along the sea front ; but it must be very warm to tempt a man or woman of fashion at Palermo to leave the crush of carriages and the noise and excitement of the busy street for the quiet of the Marina. This *Passeggiata* is a wonderful thing ; for stupidity and dulness it beats our church parade in the park hollow. For the young man in London who stands with his companions on the social climb, pinned with his back against the railings, very much resembling a sparrow on a spit, has at least the chance of speaking to a girl of his acquaintance should he see her in the crowd ; but the Sicilian young man can only bow either from the obscure distance of a very closed carriage or from the crowded footpath.

But "carriage folk" do not often bow to foot folk in Sicily, they look the other way; for if you are too poor to hire a carriage when a corso only costs fifty cents, or to keep a conveyance, of a sort, of your own, you must indeed have come to the point of starvation. "I cannot afford to drive, and to walk I am ashamed" keeps many descendants of bygone Palermitan princes from joining in this social event of their day. Poor, proud Sicily, starving within her despoiled palaces! since her sons are not men enough to see the nobility of work. In England the first thing a man in reduced circumstances parts with is, as a rule, his carriages and horses; it is his natural idea of retrenching the expenses of his establishment. A Sicilian will sell almost everything, and often come near going without food itself, before he will part with his carriage and horses. It is not that he loves his horses better than an Englishman, but that his foolish pride will not let him shake off the yoke of custom. Society expects him to keep up this pitiful appearance of luxury, just as it expects his hands to be above work and his brains beneath intelligence?

Up and down this noisy, crowded street the occupants of the various carriages pass and repass each other a dozen times in an afternoon. Even in the finest weather the carriages are for the most part closed, and all you catch sight of is rich furs, and dark eyes gleaming eloquent answers to some ardent glance from some other carriage. This wonderful drive does not begin till sundown even in the winter. I cannot explain why, unless Sicilians dine at four o'clock in the afternoon as people used to in Scotland.

At this time the narrow side-walk is crowded with overdressed men and women of the well-to-do

lower classes, and undersized boys, with bold staring eyes, twirling cheap gaily headed walking-sticks. These wretched boys hang about the pavements, ogling and criticising every woman who passes. I have seen nothing so degenerate, or so wholly offensive, as these cheaply dressed, idle youths of Palermo, who make a sort of outdoor club of the Quattro Canti, and who spend their days in smoking cigarettes—or the ends of cigarettes. Moving along in the stream of carriages you will see cavalry officers in their pale blue cloth cloaks, and darker uniforms gleaming with silver braid, their legs elegantly crossed and stretched well across the small, badly constructed cabs, for which they pay the large sum of fourpence-halfpenny for a corso. Next comes the young Sicilian man-about-town, who has a little money and knows well how to get rid of it; he will be driving in a smart little dog-cart with a hog-maned mare, looking as English as possible, considering the natural obstacles in his way. It is curious, I think, how the men of all nations wish to appear English, while a woman is never so pleased as when you tell her that a bonnet or a gown is “very French.” I believe an Englishman could make a man his enemy for life if he told him he looked just like a Frenchman, even if he said it in the most flattering tone. It may be one thing for a Frenchman to feel French, but it is another thing for him to look it. Can patriotism go so far?

Some of the carriages—those belonging to the very wealthy nobles—are exquisitely appointed, and the absurdly high-stepping horses have a showy beauty dear to the hearts of their owners. Italian horse-dealers go over the British Isles and buy up

every showy, high-stepping brute they can lay their hands on—horses which would scarcely fetch a song in England, where a man looks for something better in his beast than a circus action. Contrasted with these smart carriages are the antiquated old family barouches, which look as if they had been painted and upholstered at home for many generations, and are drawn by horses as woefully depressed and humble in appearance. A horse that has seen better days feels his position keenly when he is made to join in a parade of this sort; I have often grieved for these poor brutes, whose feelings are apparently so much more sensitive than their masters’.

And now I must tell you about Doris and myself, and after that perhaps you will say that you now know the reason for the note of discord which has arisen in Sicily. It may be so, but I think not.

This morning Doris came to me looking a little distressed. She wished to say something and did not know how to begin.

“Palermo is horribly civilised, isn’t it?” she said.

“Horribly,” I answered; “but there is the beautiful mediæval Palermo, with its Arabo-Norman palaces and churches, which we haven’t yet seen. I think we shall find it less civilised than you imagine—its civilisation is probably only skin-deep.”

“I didn’t mean civilised quite in that way; I mean that one cannot do just quite what one likes in Palermo. One must be a little more conventional——”

The words were spoken in a way which told me there was more to follow.

“You must wear gloves, I suppose, and perhaps

you will buy a veil; but I don't think we need bother about the fashionable Palermo."

We were silent for a moment, when she said abruptly:

"I hate old women, don't you? They can think such horrid things about such nice people."

"What have they been thinking about you?" I asked. I could hear by the tone of her voice that anything rather than sympathy from me was politic at the moment.

"Oh, idiotic, absurd things that nobody but old maids would think of. I know such an idea never entered into your head."

"Tell me what idea," I said. "I am sure it is not worth troubling about, whether it is true or not."

"Oh, I can't tell you," she replied, her quivering face distressed with blushes. "It is so absurd and so vulgar."

"If it is vulgar and connected with you, I never entertained it for one moment. But can't you tell me?—it does one good to be out with things."

"Well, I mean . . . it is vulgar and unladylike and . . . Oh! . . . just like old women, to think that people can't be just friends, because one is a man and the other is a girl!" After the hesitation at the beginning of this rather vague explanation, the words were got out with a rush.

"Have they been busy over our friendship?" I asked. "I suppose in the big salon last night they put you through a cross-examination?"

"Yes; and they are not so easily satisfied as the driver at Castrogiovanni. I can't leave them with the simple fact that I am your niece, for I can see that they are interested in us; that the lie would not stop there."

“What have they been worrying you about?” I said. “Why tell them anything? They are the usual human rats which infest any cheap hotel or boarding-house in Europe. You can’t get away from them; no climate will kill them, and they live for ever.”

“I had to tell them something, so I told them that you were quite old enough . . . no, I mean that I was young enough to be——”

“My daughter,” I said, finishing her sentence. “So you are, little one; quite young enough.”

“I wish I was your daughter,” she replied. “But perhaps . . . perhaps you aren’t old enough to be my father—that is what they mean, I suppose?”

“Quite old enough,” I said.

“‘A woman is as old as she looks,’ they told me; ‘and a man as old as he feels.’ . . . How old do you feel?” She asked the question a little sadly.

“Young enough to wring their necks,” I said savagely.

“But you *do* feel old enough to be my father, don’t you? I have not been foolish?”

“If your father had lived,” I said, “how old would he have been to-day?”

“I was born when he was only twenty-four,” she said, with a little smile, “and that was in the year——”

“Yes,” I said, with a ring of sincerity in my voice; “I feel quite old enough to have been your father.”

“I know you do, dear friend. Surely even a girl knows when a man treats her like a father. You would have been silly and sentimental before now if you had ever thought of me in any other way. They—they——” she hesitated,—“they don’t

know that we have been to Castrogiovanni or Girgenti."

"Then they never shall know, and please forget all that they have said," I urged, taking her hand in mine. "Remember, that people with small lives of their own are always busy about other people's."

"I'll try to forget," she answered, not raising her usually frank sweet eyes to mine, "but these things stick to one. They are not like famous dates in history which one tries to remember and always forgets."

The upshot of it all is that I am going to remain in this old palace and Doris is going to the Hôtel des Palmes. She has taken a dislike to this place and to the class of people in it, so she says; but I can clearly see that the old gossips have been hinting that there is something more than platonic affection in my attitude towards her.

They have taken it upon themselves after only two evenings' acquaintance to give her some wise advice. I am, it appears, a foolish old man, who has fallen in love with a girl who is too young and too innocent to grasp the situation.

"No man who isn't your father can ever feel old enough to be so, if you are a woman and pretty," they told her, "no matter what your age may be. But a woman often feels young enough to be the daughter of the man she marries."

Poor little Doris! I know that she is distressed at the idea that she may have caused me pain. So far she has taken everything for granted delightfully; she has been so confident that I feel as old as she evidently thinks I am. There is a new look in her face to-day of something discovered, there is even a hint of shyness in her manner towards me.

She had a letter from her guardian to-day, and she is to join him in Malta in a month's time. Poor child, she dreads her life there with her new guardianess; but if this marriage had not taken place Doris would not have been sent to Syracuse. The cunning old fox knew the Villa Politi pretty well; Malta is but a night's sail from Syracuse, and he was sure that he had nothing to fear in the way of penniless suitors for his pretty ward there, and Madame Politi is the kindest and best of women.

Of course we will continue to do sight-seeing, Doris and I, but the *we two-ness* of it is finished.

Yours affectionately,

J. C.

PALERMO, THE HAPPY CITY (*In urbe felici Panorma*),
PALAZZA MONTELEONE,
March 17th.

DEAREST LOUISE,—

The Palermo newsboys are making the streets echo with the “ Capture of Bloemfontein.” What voices they have got, to be sure! more musical than our newspaper boys at home, and pitched many notes higher.

The Palazzo Monteleone is served by a newspaper man, not a boy; at each meal he comes into the *sala* and salutes the crowd. If there is good news of the war he goes first to the Englishpeople seated at the table and offers them his different papers with a complacent smile; if there is a reverse, or the rumour of one, which is not unusual, he apologises and goes to every one in their turn. He seems to consider himself personally responsible for the contents of the various papers, and thinks it is rude to offer you bad news. He is really most entertaining. As most people can read newspaper Italian upon subjects like the war in South Africa, he has a very good sale for his wares. Sicilians love newspapers, I think, next to lotteries; they are more universally bought by the very poor in Sicily than they are in England.

But the newspaper boys are nowhere with the ordinary street hawker, who suddenly startles the whole community by shouting out his wares. Until your ears have heard a Sicilian calling out that his purple cauliflowers are fresh and cheap, you have

not fully recognised what the Latin tongue can do. He begins his cry with great clearness and dramatic eloquence. When the end comes he simply opens his mouth and lets go. Although it startles you almost off the footpath you cannot help admiring the music of his voice and the cadence of the cry.

But what the street hawker has to sell is even more amusing than the way he sells it. The sponge-seller, with his person literally hung in wreaths and covered in every conceivable way with bleached-white sponges, yellow sponges, dark sponges, little sponges, big sponges, monster sponges, would give you the impression that bathing was a popular amusement in Palermo. As a matter of fact, it is doubtful if any of the inhabitants of these dark, mediæval streets, where the hawkers cry their wares, have ever been under water in their lives. The next man who carries his shop on his back, and so saves his rent, is the fur-seller. He is perhaps the most unique figure of them all. I have not the slightest idea for what purpose he sells cat-skins of every variety, dyed and undyed, roughly cured and left in their natural state, or what is the living nature of the beast, whose skin so resembles a 'possum. This particular skin is always sewn up and inflated with wind to resemble the living beast as nearly as possible. You can buy one of these inflated skins for two francs, and the villain tells you the fact often enough. Why he should think that poor people who live in the dark basements of high palaces desire to purchase an unlimited supply of wild foxes just emptied and roughly cured, I do not know; but he assures them in every tone of voice that they are genuine bargains and very rare. Rough goat-skins and sheep-skins, white and black, hang from his

shoulders down to his feet ; and on his arms, which are extended as wide as possible, there are puppies' skins, rabbit-skins, rat-skins, and every conceivable kind of inferior skin, hanging like clothes on a line to dry. There is, as in Syracuse, no carriage traffic of any kind in these dark streets, so that these human shops have the right to the middle of the road. Dark heads are thrust out inquisitively from high windows, and the idle women sitting at the open fronts of the dark *bassi* bandy words with the pedler as he passes. He is quite a wit.

But it is the water-seller whom we know best, for he alone cries his simple trade in the fashionable streets as well as in the dark places. *Acqua fresca, acqua! acqua!* is a familiar street cry on a warm sunny day in Palermo. The water is carried about in terra-cotta pitchers of immense size and of perfect Greek form, and gaily painted wooden tables with fine brass covers, fitted like cruet-stands, hold the drinking-glasses and small bottles of aniseed and sweet syrups, which the wealthy customers can afford to indulge in. The tenth part of a penny will purchase a glass of cold water, which on the hottest day is beautifully cool, for in the South all water pitchers are made of porous pottery, and the constant sweating of the water through the earthenware keeps the contents of the pitcher wonderfully cool. But even in Palermo let me advise the parched stranger to reserve his thirst for a glass of wine ; it is safer, and will be less expensive in the end.

These *acqua*-sellers are delightfully picturesque features in the streets. The gaily painted tables, with their brass tops glittering and flashing in the sun, are carried easily in one hand, while the Greek pitcher is held in the other, and the surprising thing

is that the man does such a roaring trade by simply selling water. He puts down his table every minute and pours some of the water out of the Greek pitcher into a queer glass tumbler; then to well-off customers a drop or two is shaken out of a narrow-necked bottle, with a brass top, into the tumbler, and the water at once becomes cloudy, just as if ammonia had been put into it. This uninviting beverage is handed to the customer on a little brass tray, just large enough to hold the blown-glass tumbler, and in return one *soldo* is deposited in a little drawer of the table. The glass is quickly returned to its stand, and in another minute *Acqua, acqua, acqua fresca!* is shouted up the street once more.

The numerous public fountains, which are the features of any Sicilian town, do not spoil the man's trade. People do not come to the fountains to drink water, but to gossip. Both churches and fountains are accountable for a deal of love-making and scandal in Sicily, and they are also the happy playgrounds for little children. The water which is drawn from the public fountains by bebies of comely women, who come to chaperone each other, is drawn only for household purposes, not for cooking or drinking. I have often noticed how fond babies are of playing with water and coal; there is not an infant born in the purple of any land, I believe, who would not find his way to the coal-scuttle if he were left alone in a drawing-room for five minutes, and in any country a puddle of indifferent water appeals to every child. I have noticed this over and over again. Water and coal must be primitive tastes, for babies infinitely prefer a lump of good honest coal to the finest silver rattle ever presented by a dutiful godparent.

I must confess that both the beauty and romance of Palermo develop day by day. It is a city which unfolds its beauty to loving eyes. "Palermo, the happy city" (*In urbe felici Panorma*), the great Emperor Frederick the Second wrote of it on his royal charters. The Royal Chapel, or the Cappella Palatina as it is called, built by King Roger the Second in 1132, is the jewel of Sicily. Even St. Mark's, in Venice, I think, has not quite the same poetic quality in its beauty. St. Mark's is grander, but when your memory compares the two rivals together, it is this little Arabo-Norman chapel, the casket of mosaics, which appeals to your emotions.

It is indeed a king's chapel, all glorious within. To attempt to describe it would show how vulgar my estimate had been of its rare beauty. Can you suggest in mere words the rich glow of ancient undulating walls, encrusted with golden mosaics, softened in tone since King Roger's time, and illustrated with portraits and scenes of important Biblical personages and events, wrought by people whose one idea it was to teach the Bible simply and forcibly to those who could not read. King Roger made the walls of his chapel the Bible of the people: here is the beginning of the world and the creation of man, and there, above the high altar, sits the enthroned Christ. Generations upon generations of devout worshippers have learned their Bible from these imperishable mosaics. Columns of porphyry and cipollino seem to drop down like lovely stalactites from the golden Saracenic arches; everything is soft and bathed in warm tones, for, though no windows are visible, soft gleams of sunshine do pierce their way through narrow shafts in the ancient walls to wake the mosaics into a golden glory.



“The Cappella Palatina . . . the jewel of Sicily. Even St. Mark’s, in Venice, I think, has not quite the same poetic quality in its beauty.”

[To face p. 206.]

But there! I am daring to describe one of the wonders of mediæval art, making you see in your mind's eye, no doubt, some garish chapel, a mass of new gold, glass, and offensive marble, which might serve for the Lord Mayor's antechamber at a City Company's banquet.

If I told you that the beauty of the famous Easter candlestick, which stands fourteen feet high and came from Constantinople, although it was carved by Norman workmen, almost brought tears to my eyes, you would say I had been reading Ruskin, and undermining my constitution by a prolonged diet of slaughtered kid; and I wonder what idea you would carry away of the marble pulpit if I were fool enough to tell you the truth: that it is one of the pulpits built by these earnest men of long ago, who thought that no stone was too rare or priceless, no time too long, no money too much to devote to the beautifying of a throne from which the word of God was to be preached. These mediæval artists seem to me to have been men sent by God to beautify His sanctuaries on earth. They were divinely inspired for divine art. The chapel is small, and it is full of such priceless marbles that I should not have been surprised if it had been guarded night and day by a picquet of soldiers, for if such a glorious thing as the priceless Easter candlestick was ever mutilated and carried off, the jewel of Sicily would be despoiled. In such a country I would have such a treasure guarded night and day.

Palermo, besides containing such marvels of architectural beauty as the Cappella Palatina and the five-domed church of San Giovanni degli Eremiti, which is one of the earliest existing Arabo-Norman churches (founded in 1132) and the most

Oriental building in Palermo, and the Saracenic palaces of La Cuba and La Zisa, has an individual beauty of its own. It is the city *par excellence* of palm gardens, and it is after visiting its gardens that you forget your first unfavourable impression of the city, and own that Palermo is beautiful. The gardens of Palermo satisfy your wildest imagination of luxurious Southern vegetation and beauty. Indeed, they are typical of the magic word south. The Palermitan calls his garden a villa, which is a little confusing to the uninitiated stranger, who naturally does not associate a *villa* in Palermo with anything very wonderful or romantic. When a cab-driver urges you to visit the Villa Belmonte or the Villa Tusca, or insists upon your getting out of your cab and walking through the Villa Giulia, he does not mean you to inspect a modern house on the outskirts of the city, but a famous garden, not the least bit German, or like Elizabeth's, but deliciously Sicilian and picturesque—a garden whose herbaceous border was full a hundred years ago. In the old days, the Sicilian nobles, who lived in the dark, fortress-like palaces in the city, always made themselves spacious gardens on the borders of the city, where they carried out their princely ideas of landscape effects in a truly princely style. The city of Palermo has grown since these old gardens were made, but they have not been touched. The jerry-builder has not laid his hands upon the beautiful villas of Palermo.

In a climate like this, where things grow for the asking, and where there is so much to ask, vegetation assumes a magnificence undreamt of in the North. Indeed, you feel a little overwhelmed by the absolute abandonment of nature when you first visit these villas. Things don't seem to know how to grow big enough, or what new depth of colour

to add to the brilliance of their flowers. Nothing can flower or grow in Northern moderation ; a hundred gardeners might cut and prune and nip off buds all day long, but nature would outgrow them.

Rare palms soar into the blue sky, endeavouring to shake themselves free of some gay creeper which has festooned itself to the heavy leaves and does not mean to stop there ; it will throw itself on to the coral-tree and the spreading aloe, and wreath the garden with a cataract of gold. Even the Judas-tree will not escape its embraces. This creeper, the honey-flower (*Fiore di Miele*)—for the Sicilian gardener calls every heavily scented flower which feeds the bees a honey-flower—is one of the most typical features in a Sicilian villa. As you approach the gate, a breath of air laden with the perfume of freesias and honey-flowers greets you, and you may be perfectly certain that, however dry and flowerless the season may be, the *Fiore di Miele* will be in bloom.

I think these private gardens, of immense size and romantic beauty, detached from any house, have a touch of silent sentiment about them which is very pleasant. The long walks under the orange groves, and the old white marble moss-covered seats with carved arms, secluded from observation by the shower of purple bougainvillæa, which falls in a gay cascade over a rustic belvedere, suggest stolen meetings and pretty lovers' greetings. The gay flower-beds, the deep green palms, and the long rose-walk, where the bees hum, form a suitable setting to a Sicilian romance, and the beauty of it all is that there are no windows in a high house to overlook the prince's pleasure, as he sees the flutter of a white dress hurrying across the flower garden to find refuge under a kind screen of roses. Nor can gardeners carry gossip to a parcel of idle house-

servants. The villa is so large that the carriage which dropped the lady will take a good half-hour before it reaches the north gate. Oh, what a place for lovers to wander on a warm Sicilian day!

The formal Italian garden, with its grey-stone basins of flowers and its splashing fountains, is a little too exposed to the sun; the palm grove, where the shadows rest, is cooler and more restful. There you can sit in the deep green and conjure up romances, which could never be so impossible as the romances of Sicilian high life.

Picture what you like, the dramatic Sicilian can always go one better. But be sure you make the princess pretty, for Sicilian princesses are the prettiest in the world. They are as pretty as the peasants, which is saying a good deal for a real live princess, for the peasants in Sicily all look like unreal princesses in fairy tales. It is the commercial classes in Sicily who are plain and vulgar, and utterly devoid of even their national birthright—the art of walking divinely.

As I think I have mentioned before, there is no real middle class in Sicily; there are the proud aristocracy and the people. The *people*, roughly speaking, includes every one who works for his living; this fact alone gives a touch of mediæval romance to society and deprives the country of her backbone. A backbone may be a very useful thing, but sometimes it is a little stiff. Sicily is not stiff, it is elegant and refined. Of course the ordinary middle-class English tourist, who spends a winter there, sums Sicily up as *immoral*; does he ask himself what England would be like deprived of her backbone? Mrs. Grundy is the patron saint of the English middle classes, just as San Giuseppe is the people's popular saint in Sicily; but then San

Giuseppe is a good sort ! There is no reason why the English middle classes should be immoral—it would be wholly unpardonable in them if they were ; but you have only to come to Sicily to see that there is every reason why the aristocracy should be shown some leniency in that respect. An unnatural life is asked of them which leads to natural sins. They adore intrigue and scorn scandal. Mrs. Grundy would die from sheer neglect in a country where no one is shocked at their neighbour's morals and no wife expects fidelity.

I spend the greater part of my time in wandering about these glorious gardens ; they are to me the most enchanting thing in the city, and the surprise is to find them in a busy, noisy city. Quite one of the most beautiful, in spite of the fact that too much space of latter years has been given over to orange and lemon groves, belongs to the Duc d'Orleans. There is a house in this villa—which sounds a little confusing until you remember that the villa is not a villa, but a garden. It is a tall white château, with green jalousies and a wide brick terrace in front of it on a level with the front rooms. A beautiful view of the extensive garden is obtained from this charming terrace, which has a fascinating rose arbour at each end, for the house is on a much higher elevation than the garden.

I chanced upon this villa quite by accident. I had never even heard of it from a cabman, and from the street-front the tall château looks like a barrack ; but, as good luck would have it, as I was idling along the rather uninteresting street, the door of the outer courtyard stood open, and, as I have learnt that it is unwise to pass an open door in Sicily without looking to see what is behind it, I stopped and looked in. The things of real beauty in these

ancient cities mostly lie hidden behind uninviting walls. A cold, narrow, dark street, for instance, may have smiling orange gardens on either side of it, blocked from your view by Arabo-Norman palaces.

The lodge-keeper was standing at the open door of the duke's garden as I peeped across the threshold, and graciously gave me permission to enter; the duke was not in Palermo, and although the garden was not generally shown to visitors he would make an exception in my favour. These exceptions are so well acted in Sicily that you *do* feel yourself a person of distinction.

He was a fine, big fellow, dressed in smart hunter's green, and I felt that I would be compelled to give him a fine big tip—of 4½*d.*, for that is how tips run in Palermo—for granting me the favour. I could not help smiling to myself as I thought of how it would be in England if a stranger in London stepped across the threshold of a prince's home and expected to be allowed to wander about unattended, as I did, for two long hours in that amazing Southern garden. Nor had I seen the half of its beauties at the end of that time, for one avenue alone, in the centre of the garden, of pollard acacias was a quarter of a mile in length, and the rose-walk, gay with crimson ramblers, led me on and on, holding out at discreet intervals inviting seats of white carved marble sheltered by roses and *Fiore di Miele*. But I was not tempted. The seats were made for two, and I was alone!

Then the mazes, which Sicilians are so fond of in their gardens, often kept me imprisoned for an endless time. These mazes contain hundreds of hidden jets of water, and woe betide the lady dressed in chiffon who gets caught in the trap! At

every turn, as you fly angrily hither and thither, vainly endeavouring to get out of the maze, fine sprays of water cover you. It is no use attempting to avoid them, for the ground is literally undermined with fine pipes, and wherever you put your foot you are certain to start another jet into action. These mazes are very amusing when another man's best hat is being spoilt, or when a pretty girl flies about like a chicken frightened by a dog, but personally I get tired of being drenched even in summer. They are so typically Sicilian that no well-laid-out garden is complete without its maze.

In the South people are simple and easily amused. I can imagine a prince's garden-party gay with laughter over this childish sport, nor would they look foolish in the trying situation, but like happy grown-up children enjoying the fun. I can imagine them all going out in the wind and playing at having their hats blown off; they would scream and laugh and rush about and continue to look charming.

When I passed the porter's lodge at the end of the two hours, the fine fellow in green presented me with a Sicilian bouquet of flowers, which was as formal and trim in its ingenuity as their gardens are natural and artistic. In return I presented him with fourpence-halfpenny. He was delighted, and told me that if I had come two days later I could not have seen the garden, for the duke was expected. The housekeeper was busy preparing the rooms.

Now do not imagine that this garden was a dilapidated old affair, where there was nothing much to steal or destroy. It was very much the reverse. Although the place was luxurious in its vegetation, it was kept in perfect order—the artistic order of the South—and rare flowers tempted one

at every turn. It was difficult not to steal. The blue-frocked under-gardeners, who were busy stacking the oranges in golden heaps beneath the groves, wished me a smiling good-day as I passed them. Of course, the patient mule, harnessed to the gaily painted cart, was waiting to carry the oranges to the packing-house. If this beautiful *château* was ever converted into a hotel I can imagine Palermo becoming as popular as Nice; at the present time I do not think that Palermo has a hotel worthy of the city.

Visitors to the South wish to be immediately surrounded by the magic of the South, and you have it here in the duke's garden, as you have it at the Villa Politi at Syracuse. And the fine broad terrace leading out from the lofty rooms, what a place to wander on after meals! so dry, so graciously bathed in sunshine, with the dark green orange and lemon groves lying down below to tempt idle lovers to wander. In this villa, with its moss-grown paths and wonderful flowers, making a gay June of cold March, you are so far removed from the atmosphere of a city that the shock is a rude one when you find yourself suddenly let out into the street which leads up to the Royal Palace. It is true you had gone in from the street, but you had forgotten that!

One other feature of the dark streets in old Palermo which I have not mentioned, and which is most worthy of notice, is the fruit-stalls. The arrangement of them is most ingenious and amusing; a splendid mass of colour is obtained most artistically, for the stalls are invariably placed under little arches or old doorways, which are thickly wreathed with branches of freshly-gathered oranges, gleaming in their glossy leaves; these wreaths are again festooned with strings and bunches of small, very red tomatoes, and snow-white onions. On the

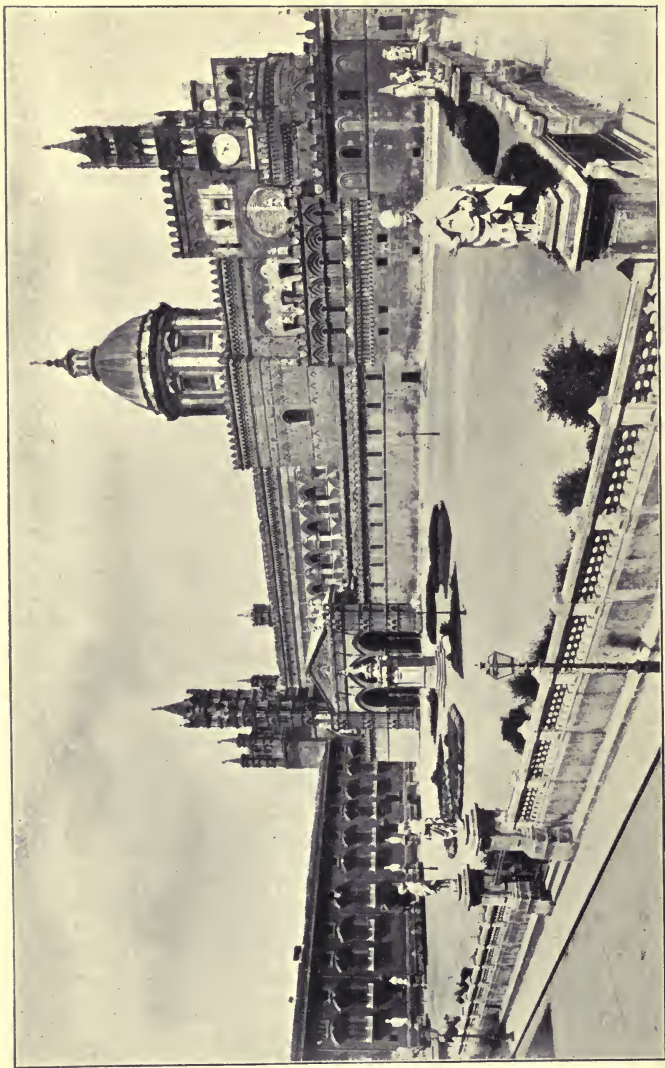
stall beneath are immense lemons and pale shad-docks, purple cauliflowers, and curious vegetables of unknown names. Far back in the dark archway, piled up high, tier upon tier, are flat baskets gaily fringed with tissue paper and filled with strange bright fruits. Even the lettuces are most cleverly arranged, and so much use is made of the fine flaming carrots for decorative purposes that it seems a pity to buy any and so spoil the clever design. Heavy, blue-rooted onions, which have been allowed to sprout and throw up pale green shafts, play an important part in the general effect; and I must not forget the handsome copper cauldrons, deposited on the ground, full of hot artichokes, boiled with a slice of lemon, ready for the busy housewife, who comes along and takes her choice out of the tempting pot. She has only to cross the streets to the public cookery to buy some fried fish, steaming hot and very savoury, spluttering out boiling oil from a flat copper pan on a vast white porcelain stove. Even if she spends but a few sous there, she can buy a good variety of Sicilian dainties. A cuttle fish, for instance, baked in batter; or the juicy legs of a frog; or, better still, a slice of hot blood-cake. These and one *soldo's* worth of new wine from the humble trattoria (public house), which never forgets to sport its branch of olive over the door, will make a tasty meal for a household which has no fire.

These public cookeries are capital institutions; the food is excellent, and costs incredibly little, for it is all, of course, composed of the cheapest edibles imaginable, things which the poor of vulgar nations would turn up their proud noses at, and throw out to the pigs with their "beefy hands." You can watch the preparation of the food and the cooking of it from the street, for the immense white stove

forms the front wall of the shops. Even the poorest food is cleanly and delicately cooked, in oil, no doubt, judging from the smell, which is not pleasant to English noses; but the difference between hot oil and hot lard is surely a matter of taste and prejudice.

I hope I have managed to convey to you a little of the character of Palermo; it is much more difficult to give you a word-picture of *Sicilian* Palermo than *Sicilian* Syracuse or Girgenti, for Palermo is in touch with the world and has taken on worldly ways. Here you only come across Sicily in vivid flashes, which are thrown out of one's memory when the time for letter-writing comes by the every-day sights and sounds which one can hear and see in any Continental city. I have tried so far only to give you glimpses of real Sicily, so please don't expect me to tell you in detail about the endless beautiful things which there are in and round about this city. Guide-book reading is, I know, dull stuff for an invalid, and if I were to write you descriptions by the score of Norman chapels and Saracen ruins, I should end, I know, by cribbing from Baedeker. If there have been any gross inaccuracies in my letters it is because I carefully remembered your instruction: "Write me long letters, and as womanish ones as ever you can. Tell me things about the people and all sorts of every-day Sicilian things. I don't care about aqueducts and coliseums. I want to imagine I am seeing Sicily myself, and I never do sights." That is what you said in your first letter when you begged for this journal.

Doris goes to the Hôtel des Palmes to-morrow. We have only met at early coffee and at dinner at six for the last two days. Some friends of her guardian, who are staying at the Hôtel des Palmes,



“The most curiously southern thing in Palermo is its Saracenic cathedral built by the Englishman,
[To face p. 216,
Walter of the Mill.”

having called upon her and carried her off with them to see the sights of Palermo. I was not invited to join the party.

Now that I have no companion to tempt me to idle my time away in these scented gardens of Palermo, I may, to please you, take up my manuscript again, for it is extraordinary how much further time goes, and how the days spin out, when you have them all to yourself. With Doris it seemed as if we never had more than five minutes anywhere for pleasant idling; when I am alone, although I may sit in the morning thinking and dreaming in the Cappella Palatina for long hours, when I come out into the brilliant sunshine again it is not yet midday; the workmen are still busy, they have not flung aside their tools on the stroke of twelve to sleep below the shade of the pepper trees for one happy hour. And if I go out in the afternoon, I somehow find more than abundant time to see the cathedral, which was built by an Englishman, named Walter of the Mill, in 1169. To me its only beauties are its glorious Arabo-Norman doorway and the fascinating white square which runs the whole length of the rather low, long building. On the wall which encloses this square there are some pleasing old statues of cardinals and archbishops and other stately mitred things of the Catholic Church, and in the square itself there are dark palm-trees, tall and waving, which give the place a truly Southern aspect. When a priest's school of some twenty pale youths, dressed in long purple tunics faced with scarlet, passes across the white square, and lingers under the shadow of a Moorish doorway, or when a cardinal-bishop, followed by some dignitaries of the Church, steps out of the ancient archiepiscopal palace, which faces the piazza, and quickly dis-

appears through the west door of the cathedral, which has been opened for his special benefit, you feel that you are indeed in the very South and that the most curiously Southern thing in Palermo is its Saracenic cathedral built by the Englishman, Walter of the Mill.

Palermo must have been full of Arab masons during the Norman period in Sicily; you can trace their delicate handiwork everywhere. The five-domed church of the Eremiti, which I have mentioned already, is nothing more or less than an Oriental mosque, and the church of the Martorana is another. After I had examined all these buildings as well as I cared to in one afternoon, I still found some time on my hands before dinner; so I sat myself down in the quiet little cloisters of the Eremiti, and let the custodian who looks after the building talk to me to his heart's content. He is old, and sells new antiques in a little shop across the road, and is one half villain and the other half a very good fellow who loves his flowers and who has made the cloister of the Eremiti one of the most beautiful spots in all Palermo. He watches his garden as tenderly as a mother tends her child, and for that reason how patiently I listened to his long-winded story of an orange-tree on which there are growing fourteen different kinds of fruit—all of them of course citrons! I did not buy any of his new antiques, but I admired his garden, which pleased him equally as well. The old Norman arches, with their slender columns wreathed with pink roses and hanging with pale wistaria tassels, and the fine old well-head in the centre of the small cloister-yard, have been painted by thousands of admiring artists of all nations, and in every photographer's shop in Sicily you can buy beautiful pictures of the famous cloisters of San Giovanni degli Eremiti.

But these luxurious gardens and the beautiful Norman ruins are not very satisfying when you sit in them all by yourself. I miss the magic laughter of blue eyes and the enthusiasm of youth, which have been with me in Sicily until now.

Yours,
J. C.

PALERMO, PALAZZO MONTELEONE.

March 19th.

DEAR LOUISE,—

Alice's boy has arrived. Yesterday, while we were seated at lunch in the grand *sala* under the Judgment of Paris, awaiting the arrival of the most sumptuous part of the ox, in Jack walked, just as if he had lived in Palermo all his life, and as if he owned it too, by Jove! The young Swiss clerk who sits next to Doris at *table d'hôte*, and who has been improving his English at the expense of her good-nature,—he is wonderfully like a shaved pink pig (the Swiss, I mean, not Alice's boy, who is just what Alice's son should be like),—seemed to think that any one as correctly dressed and well built had a perfect right to look as if he owned the whole world. Even a Swiss may look at an Englishman, and how that Swiss did look at Jack! Doris was in the middle of explaining to him in English something about London fogs at the moment of Jack's arrival. The word fog had puzzled the shaved pig completely.

"No, mademoiselle," he said, "do not speak it in French, if you please, but *smell* it in English, and I will understand."

Doris thought for a moment.

"You can smell a fog when it is very bad," she said laughingly to me. "But what *can* he mean? Ah! I know. He means *spell*, of course."



"The cloister of the Eremiti, one of the most beautiful spots in all Palermo."

[To face p. 220.]



“ You mean spell,” she said, trying not to smile and speaking very distinctly.

“ Aw ! yes, smell, if you please. I can read, but not speak zee English. If you smell zee words I will know it.”

“ S p e l l,” Doris said again, slowly emphasising each letter—“ not s m e l l.”

“ Excuse me, I do not understand what zee word s p e l l iss. To smell zee word is to make it more understanding, for I smell all zee words when I read.”

“ F o g,” Doris spelt the word very slowly.

“ Foog,” he said, shaking his pink head slowly. “ Not at all. I have not yet smelt zee word fog in my English grammeer——”

He stopped suddenly, for there was Jack standing right in front of him, in the most immaculate suit of dark blue flannel you ever saw. The Swiss had on grey bicycling flannels made in Switzerland. How Jack’s suit ever accomplished the journey to Sicily I don’t know, nor do I know how an English youth who is really quite undistinguished in cast of features can manage to look so distinguished ! That was the question I asked myself as Jack stood there amongst a room full of Italians, Germans, Swiss, and one or two odd English. The salon and the people, with the exception of Doris, looked old and dilapidated and horribly shoddy, but Jack looked as if he had just had a bath before leaving his chambers in St. James’s Street, Piccadilly.

One other thought entered my head.

“ I wonder what Doris will think of him?—he is the first male person of her own age she has met since she came to Sicily.”

"I've dropped down from the clouds rather suddenly," he began; "I only arrived last night. I thought I'd look you up first thing. I didn't know you lunched so early."

I shook hands, and I managed to get out something about being delighted to see him, and invited him to have some lunch with us. The Swiss caught his cold eyes after much hard staring, and bowed elaborately. Jack inclined his head a fractional part of an inch. He had in one quick glance taken in the ill-made flannel suit, the shirt which was laced up the front with a green silk cord, and the collarless neck. "Some Swiss thing," he said to himself. "How can that nice-looking English girl talk to him?" I saw his eyes fall on Doris, so I introduced him.

Doris was frank and charming; Jack was lofty and apparently indifferent.

"Have you been in Sicily long?" he asked. "I can't find anything decent to eat. Do they do you well here?"

"Not very," I said, noting the amused smile in Doris's eyes. "I don't think the food would suit you. It's a little goaty."

"I'm staying at the Hôtel de France," he said, casting a hurried glance round the occupants of the room. "I don't much fancy the kind of people you get in these old palaces, somehow; but I'm going to move to the Hôtel des Palmes to-morrow. I want a south room, and there's none vacant in the Hôtel de France."

"Doris goes to the Hôtel des Palmes to-morrow," I said to myself, "and I am to remain here."

The Swiss, to make room for Jack, had pushed his chair a little nearer to the lady of forty, who wears orange-blossom in her hair every night at dinner, as a protest against the gay widow who has dyed her hair orange gold. The shaved Swiss does not approve of these two ladies, for he confided to Doris that they spoke American, and he wished to learn English. Pietro, the waiter, was so much agitated by Jack's pale mauve shirt, that he promptly spilt a cup of black coffee over Doris's white skirt and Jack's brown boots.

"Pietro is eager, but not able," I said, "and his apologies are profuse."

"*Basta, basta!*" Jack said impatiently, while Pietro rubbed the polish off his boots. "I've only been twenty-four hours in Sicily, and I'm sick to death already of their fine excuses and eloquent apologies. When English servants do things badly, they aren't allowed to make excuses; they must take scoldings."

"Oh, please don't begin comparing Sicilians with the English!" Doris said; "they are as different as English and Hindoos."

"That's just what they are," he said eagerly. "Now you've hit it. They are *natives*, in the Eastern sense of the word, playing at being Europeans. Graceful, cringing, apologetic liars; every man-Jack of them would let you kick him if you paid him well enough. I hope you aren't one of the people who think it is right to admire everything and anything because it is Italian?" he said, addressing Doris.

"Oh! I don't know about admiring Italy and Sicily," Doris said coldly; "I love them both.

Italy is like a beautiful child. When you go away from it, you are afraid it will have grown up and have lost its charm before you see it again."

"I see I've said the wrong thing," Jack said, laughing in a natural, boyish fashion, which made you like him. "But, you know, I don't understand anything about pictures, and Italy is one vast picture-gallery, isn't it? And I hate statues; they're so cold."

"There are few pictures in Sicily worth bothering about," I said; "and there is only one Sicilian sculptor worthy of the name."

"Oh! but I love Gagini!" Doris said hastily; "and I do so want you to come to the museum with me. The courtyard is the loveliest thing in Palermo." She looked at me almost reproachfully. "Don't you think so?"

"Of course I'll come," I said; "and I, too, like Gagini's work amazingly. I think his *bénitier* in the cathedral is the most beautiful thing in the building. I prefer it to the famous porphyry tombs of the kings. Porphyry is unfortunately very like chocolate in my eyes, and King Roger's tomb reminds me of Cadbury's Christmas advertisements. The courtyard of the museum is fascinating; you would never imagine it was a museum," I said, turning to Jack, "for the priceless old statues and antiques of every kind are arranged in the most artistic manner round and about the columned courtyard of an old convent; bright creepers and prickly-pears hang down from the Arabesqued trellis above the arches, and a cool, splashing fountain, with one graceful antique figure

in the centre, sets off the open court. It is a pleasure, and not a toil, spending a warm morning in that cool green museum; aloes and cacti and showers of wistaria light up the old grey stones. Of course, it is not every climate which will allow of an open-air museum."

"You don't 'do' the museums in Palermo," Doris said; "you just sit in the most beautiful convent-cloisters, as I call them, and let your eyes linger on rare and curious things of all ages. The flowers and the butterflies and the sunshine are all a part of it. It's not a bit museumic or glass-casey. I ate four oranges there this morning while I was looking at Gagini's Madonna and studying all sorts of things that I don't remember now."

"That's just the worst of it," Jack said. "I never do remember what's inside a museum once I get out of it."

"Neither do I," Doris said; "but being there must do you good. The very fact of it making you feel a fool when you are in it must have a beneficial effect, I think."

Jack laughed.

"I'm sure you needn't feel a fool," he said. "But I'm blessed if I know who Gagini is or anything about him."

"I didn't till I came to Palermo," Doris said; "nobody does. But they are so proud of him here, you will soon know. Gagini is Sicily's great sculptor."

"May I come to the museum and see his Madonna with you?" he asked. "I don't know what to do with myself here."

“Of course you may,” I said. “Let’s go after lunch. The museum-convent is just next door.”

So we went to the museum, and Doris showed Jack the beautiful Madonna, which is one of the few painted marble statues I ever really liked, and a good many other things as well. They seem to understand each other amazingly well, although Doris is all enthusiasm and simplicity, while Jack never allows himself to unbend enough for actual admiration. “Not bad,” is the highest praise I have heard him bestow upon ancient well-heads, Roman mosaic pavements, or the famous metopes of Selinunte; but Doris seems to think it is quite enough, and youth needs no understanding. Youth is a law unto itself.

If I did not admire these things more than Jack does, or did not help her to understand them a little bit, my word! I’d catch it. But to-day Doris was helping Jack to understand things, and he didn’t care two straws about them. But looking at ancient statues and Renaissance doorways was a fine excuse for lingering in the company of a charming girl, under the shade of a curtain of wistaria blossoms falling over the colonnaded cortile and within the sound of trickling water.

Jack lit a cigarette, and sat himself down upon a heap of old cannon-balls overgrown with ivy and moss.

“This place is good enough for me,” he said. “I don’t want to see the things in the museum rooms; if I remember the half of what’s in the courtyard, I’ll do very well. By the way, are there any chocolates to be had in a town like this? Wouldn’t you like some? I suppose you don’t smoke?”

“ No, I don’t smoke,” Doris said. “ But I do eat chocolates; and after we have sat here long enough, let us go and have some black coffee and cakes at Guli’s—a lovely confectioner’s! It is very amusing to go there at about eleven in the mornings, and see all the smart young men come to drink sweet syrup and eat fresh strawberry short-cakes. They are in season just now, and so good; but Caffisch has the best chocolates. What wouldn’t we have given for one of those shops in Syracuse!”

“ And my poor sweets are still on the way from England,” I thought. “ They would have been appreciated in Syracuse, but here——”

“ I’m off now,” Jack said, getting up quickly. “ Please let’s go to Cat-fish, or whatever you called this ‘ confectioner,’—the one where you get the coffee and cakes.”

Doris smiled a willing acceptance.

“ Won’t you come too?” she said, turning to me.

I had assumed to be vastly interested for the moment in the slender column entwined with ivy, which was erected in 1737 in the Piazza de’ Vesperi, in memory of the French who were buried there after the famous massacre of the Sicilian Vespers, which began on the evening of March 31st, 1282. While this bloody massacre of all the French in Palermo was taking place, the bells of the churches were tolled, which gave the massacre the picturesque name of the Sicilian Vespers.

“ Have you seen enough of the museum already?” I said, turning to Jack. “ There are some magnificent things in the inner courtyard, worthy of a few minutes of your time.”

“ I can do the museum any time,” he said ; “ but you can’t always be sure of having the right appetite on for cakes and coffee.”

And Doris actually agreed with him, although I know her appetite for such things has never failed her. But what is born of a hen will scrape, and Doris is a true woman ; and who could blame her for being willing to suit her tastes to the pleasure of so attractive a companion ?

Jack has Alice’s old trick of winning forgiveness with a smile : all his assumed indifference, his national conceit and youthful egotism vanish, and you see right into the heart of a generous, manly nature when his eyes soften with laughter and the stern young face breaks into smiles. Any girl would be glad enough to keep that light in his eyes and to soften the expression on his mouth into tenderness.

“ Ah !” I thought ; “ if youth knew and age could !”

As we passed through the town almost every other person we met was carrying a parcel wrapped up in white paper and tied with string of the national colours—red, white, and green. There was an air of general festivity in the streets, and almost all the shops were closed. Two cabs dashed past with a great cracking of whips. In one was seated a very, very old woman with an enormous cake on her lap,—a regular Sicilian cake, covered with white sugar and candied fruits, and elaborately trimmed with chocolate pipings. Sicilian cakes are even richer and more elaborate than German ones, and a spoon is quite necessary when eating one, for they are soft and moist with rum and custard. The other cab was crowded with little children,—

crowded as only a Sicilian cab can be crowded,—and each happy child was eating a cake of many colours. It was soon very apparent that all the many parcels tied up in white paper contained cakes of various descriptions, for the only shops open were the confectioners' and small cafés, where cakes and wine "sell themselves." There is a saying in Sicily that three geese and three women make a market : *Tre ocche e tre donne fanno un mercato*. I'm quite certain that two chairs and a table make a café.

"It seems to me we have chosen the right day to come and eat cakes," Jack said, as a small boy, carrying a very large cake, much taller than himself, on a beaten brass tray, pushed us off the side-walk, "for every one is either eating cakes or carrying cakes. I wonder if there is going to be a cake procession anywhere? I never saw anything quite so mad, or such elaborate cakes. Some of them must have cost a lot of money."

Doris had taken a little Italian calendar from her pocket and was studying it.

"I'll tell you what it all means," she said suddenly. "This is the feast of San Giuseppe, the people's friend. San Giuseppe cared for the poor, and fed and looked after the little children; these people are all carrying presents to their poor friends in memory of San Giuseppe."

"Good old Giuseppe!" Jack said. "Now, he was a decent sort of a saint. No lofty ideas of fasting and resisting the good things of this life."

"San Pasquale was another 'good sort,' as you would call him," Doris said laughingly. "He is the patron saint of women, for he helps poor homeless girls to find good husbands. On the feast of San Pasquale all the hard-working girls pray that

he will send them as good and kind a man as he was himself. At some of the institutions for motherless girls, young men who wish wives are allowed to go there on the feast of San Pasquale and choose themselves wives. The nuns are always willing to give the girls a good character, and they are sure to have been well trained and carefully instructed in the art of housekeeping by these "little sisters of the poor." They make their husbands excellent wives, and San Pasquale often sends the girls as good a husband as an Italian or Sicilian wife ever expects. They are willing to take their chance, for they say to themselves, '*I matrimoni sono non come si fanno, ma come riescono,*' which literally means, 'Marriages are not as they are made, but as they turn out.' "

When we arrived at Guli's, the shop was quite full; but it was filled, not with the fashionable crowd who usually frequent it at eleven o'clock in the morning and at six o'clock in the evening, but with large families of poor people dressed in their holiday best. The shawls on some of the young married women were very fine; I think they must be like the Cashmere shawls which Queen Victoria presented to each of her ladies-in-waiting on the occasion of their marriage. These old Sicilian shawls are much sought after nowadays by artists, and it is exceedingly difficult to find one for sale. Some years ago a cunning dealer in artists' properties bought up every one that he could lay his hands upon, and gave the people in exchange gaudy new Paisley shawls of the vilest dyes and designs. If you go into a draper's shop now in Syracuse or Palermo and ask to see some Sicilian coloured shawls, you are shown things made in Paisley or

Milan, for the people, after they had once seen the cheap, gaudy, foreign shawls, no longer were willing to save up their scarce sous to buy the genuine Sicilian one, which was costly as well as exquisitely beautiful. The elaborate designs are, as a rule, woven on a white or dull-orange background. One of these shawls draped over the head of a graceful Sicilian woman, and flowing down to the hem of her black skirt, makes a wonderful note of colour in a dark street.

As there was no chance of our being served with a cup of coffee, or of getting near enough to the counter to buy any cakes, we determined to give it up, and take a drive out to the Favorita.

The Favorita is a mad-looking Chinese château, which was built in the time of the Bourbons, by Ferdinand the Fourth, I think, under the shadow of Monte Pellegrino.

For a royal château it is as poor and shoddy a thing as ever you saw, but its situation is simply perfect. The mountain towers up above the lovely grounds, which are laid out very pleasantly for driving in, though they are not equal to the Parc d'Orleans in vegetation. On our way there we passed some very handsome new houses, belonging to the aristocracy of Palermo, who no longer live in the city in their dark Spanish palaces; in fact, to-day every one but a prince lives in a palace in Sicily. The Favorita is very charming, but not to be compared to many of the villas which have not so bewitching a name.

We parted with Jack just in time for dinner, which was an unusually good one to-night, in honour of San Giuseppe. Pietro was very proud of the elaborate cake, which was served instead of pudding; and our table, to please Doris, was literally covered with scarlet adonis. This little

feathery-leafed, bright-eyed flower, is called San Giuseppe's flower, because it is always in full bloom all over the country on his feast-day, and, as I have often remarked before, when a flower blooms in Sicily it knows how to bloom. There are no half measures with Southern vegetation, as there are none with the people. They both go the "whole hog," to use the vulgar expression.

So out at the Favorita to-day the sunny world was all scarlet adonis; under the orange-trees we walked ankle-deep in San Giuseppe's dear little red flower, and in the distant landscape there was a carpet of adonis spread beneath the bluest of skies. No painter could exaggerate the colour of the South on a day like this, with its sparkling atmosphere, its azure blue sky and sea, its scarlet adonis, and its soft blue-greens of aloe and agave, showing like gigantic flowers against the deep greens of the tall palms and New Zealand fern-trees. And over it all there was the great pink crown of Pellegrino, with its white zigzag pilgrims' road winding up and up its precipitous heights until it reached the little dark grotto of the girl-saint. I should like to be in Palermo on the festival of St. Rosalia, which falls on July 15th. At dinner Pietro waxed eloquent over the magnificence of the procession and the grand triumphal car of St. Rosalia. Horse-races, regattas and illuminations are kept up at a high pitch during the holiday week. It is curious that the saints' days of the Church are now the race-days of the people. The feast of the Annunciation is oddly chosen for the first grand race-meeting of the season. It is on the 25th of this month, so I will tell you all about it, even if I don't go to see it, for one can be so much more vivid when one has not actually seen things; facts hinder realism. To be

realistic you must write from your own armchair, and make your readers go to see the things you describe.

When I said good-night to Doris I was tempted to ask her what she thought of Jack; but to get the truth from a woman you should never ask for it, so I refrained.

"I am rather sorry to leave this—this Judgment of Paris," she said, looking up to the vaulted and grandly painted ceiling of the vast salon. "To-morrow I go to the Hôtel des Palmes, you know."

"Yes, I know," I said a little coldly. "But it was your own wish. I would have gone there and left you here, but you wished to go."

"I sha'n't feel the least bit as if I was in Sicily," she said; "I know I sha'n't. My friends there go about with a horrid German dragoman; we *do* about six things every morning, and pay calls all the afternoon."

"Jack will be there," I said; "he will amuse you. He won't go to see things or pay calls, I'll be bound."

"I want to see things," she said regretfully; "but not in that way. Oh, I wish we were back in Syracuse!" There was a little worried sigh.

"You won't to-morrow," I said. "And it will do you a world of good to have some of your own age to talk to—and to——"

"I thought you said a woman could make a man any age she liked. Boys are horrid! they are always old."

"Good-night," I said; and while her hand rested in mine I looked into her eyes. They were little blue wells of sadness. "And remember, dear, that a tender woman can always make a fool of an old man."

“ Good-night,” she answered, withdrawing her hand ; and as she vanished down the long dark passage she said laughingly over her shoulder : “ It entirely depends what being an old fool means, don’t you think ? ”

Yours,
J. C.

PALERMO,

March 26th, 1900.

MY DEAR LOUISE,—

In this old palace which once belonged to the proud ducal family of Pignatelli-Cortez, descendants of the great Cortez, there are many paying guests. In Sicily “ Not all those who go to church say their prayers ” (*Non tutti quelli che vanno in chiesa fanno orazione*), neither are all who live in palaces princes. Indeed, to live in a palace generally signifies that you are not a prince, but an innkeeper, or one of his guests. There is a drawback to this making of inns out of palaces which is not at first obvious, but when you reflect that only one side of any square courtyard can face the south, it is obvious that there are three sides which cannot get the morning sun, and, as palace dimensions are vast, there are not many rooms on the first floor facing the south. After many years of inn-keeping, the Sicilian landlord has learnt that even Germans will pay a few francs more per week to purchase the precious sun. This being the case, I am writing to you in the smallest of rooms, which is very apparently the third portion of an original large one. With native ingenuity the landlord has made three small rooms out of every large one on the south side of the courtyard; the walls which divide the paying guests are scarcely in keeping in

point of thickness with the original palace walls, but this does not signify so much as the fact that the elaborately painted hunting-scene on the ceiling has also been cut into three portions and each guest has got a piece. On my portion of the ceiling I have the head and fore-legs of a fine white horse, also a few trees, a distant castle, and a tempting glimpse of the short velvet tunic and pointed hose of a youthful page. The middle portion of the white horse I suppose I shall never see, for the room next to mine is occupied by the lady who wears orange-blossom in her faded hair; but I have seen the beast's tail and the falcon-bearers, for the third room is the property of an old Englishman who has lived in this palace for more years than he cares to admit. He is in a chronic state of packing up his belongings to go back to England. He is only here for his health, so he says; the rest of the palace paying guests seem to think that there may be other reasons which prevent him from returning to his native land.

He asked Doris, a day or so after our arrival here, to help him to choose some Oriental draperies from two Singalese traders, who bring their trashy stock into the big salon and spread the things about the room every day at lunch and never sell anything. Doris was good-naturedly consenting to help him in his choice, for he had, he said, "the worst taste in the world, and would never trust himself to choose anything for any one, and as these things were for his sister who was getting up a bazaar for the war fund in England he would be very grateful for Doris's advice."

“Don’t you give it,” the widow with the orange-coloured hair whispered to Doris. “He gets that off every fresh woman under fifty who comes here, and there aren’t many. He asked me to choose these things for him six months before the war broke out, and that bazaar hasn’t come off yet. He’ll ask you to look at the painted roof in his room if you do. He’s a horrid old man.”

But Doris, with her gentle nature, could not refuse the polite request, so the Oriental rubbish was duly chosen, but not paid for. I have seen two people choose the same things for him since, but the draperies are still in the possession of the Singalese, who have become indifferent in the matter.

After choosing the vulgar Eastern things, he at once asked Doris if she would care to see the most extraordinary painting on the roof of his room. She was on the point of refusing when I said, “Yes, do, for I will accompany you. I want to see the tail end of the hunting-scene. I have studied the first part of it for hours every morning in bed, and I feel curious to see how it ends.”

“If it is anything like the Judgment of Paris,” she said hesitatingly, “I think I’d better not.”

“No, it’s not a bit,” I said. “It is a painting after the school of Pinturicchio, who loved gay doublets and hose; the Judgment of Paris is after the school of Rubens—only more so. Rubens did not love hose or doublets.”

This Judgment of Paris, which covers the whole of the vaulted roof of the vast salon in which the guests feed, is, I confess, rather an alarming picture. The nude figures of the anxious Graces are quite life-size and very generously developed.

They are, however, so high overhead that to be really shocked the pale spinsters in their neat black evening gowns would find it necessary to lie down on their backs on the floor ; and this I am sure they will never do, for the floor is tiled and very cold.

In the large courtyard of the palace there is a stone fountain raised from the ground by a flight of red marble steps. A white marble cupid gushes out water into the basin from his mouth. Standing by the fountain there is at this moment an old woman with a black Sicilian shawl drawn closely over her head. She is washing some poor garments in a fine beaten-brass basin which I mean to try to purchase, so I will watch what part of the palace *bassi* she goes into. The palace only goes round three sides of this outer courtyard, for on the opposite side to the south wing there is a white-tiled terrace which is high enough to be on a level with the salon floor. Its walls are suitably ornamented with little pitchers, which are the meaning of the word *Pignatelli*, and the crest of the family of Cortez. These little pitchers of terra-cotta are filled with all sorts of Southern plants, such as small yuccas and flaming lilies. Behind this broad white-tiled terrace there is an ancient orange-garden which is dominated by two immense stone-pines. From my window these two softly spreading trees seem to grow right out of the white terrace, and the mossy branches cast deep shadows on the sunny scene. I cannot tell you how romantic and delightful the effect is, for the palace is white and very tall, with pale green shutters, and the terrace is white, and so is the splashing fountain ; the flaming lily is the only note of colour. The two dark sentinels of pines stretch out their long arms from our

orange-garden, and soften and break the dazzling south.

The general effect from my window is dark green, almost to blackness, dazzling white, and cloudless blue; the woman in her black frock, busy with the brass dish, seems to be the one touch of human nature in the scene, which is always right in Sicily.

One of the many trades, or professions, I should say, which is carried on in the *bassi* of the palace is a fencing-school. I can hear from my bedroom window from early morning until late at night, first the cat-like spring, with the dull thud, thud on the floor, and then the rapid sparring and clashing of the rapiers. All sorts and conditions of people come to this fencing-school: smart officers in pale-blue cloaks, and dandies wearing American ties and Monte Carlo hats; but the pupil I take most interest in is a young girl who steps out of a big carriage, closely veiled and jealously enveloped in a black cloak. When her lesson is going on the green jealousies are closed, and no other pupils are admitted; but I can picture to myself the slender figure in the short fencing-skirt standing erect and alert, the first quick movement forward, the lighter thud, thud on the floor, the exciting clashing of the steel, then silence again.

In the large hall on the ground-floor, below the white terrace, there is an Italian kindergarten, which used to interest Doris immensely, for the baby-scholars arrive in roomy omnibuses, built for the purpose, as early as half-past eight o'clock in the morning, and they do not go home until after four o'clock in the evening. A man-servant or a nurse always *brings* each child to school, but they do not all return for them in the evening. This

leads me to suppose that they are not sent for the safe-conduct of the child, but to see that it actually goes to school. It is a very happy school, I think, for I hear plenty of laughter and singing, and the young girls who teach in it are pretty, gentle-looking creatures. The wee babies, who are certainly beginning their education very early, have their first meal of the day at eleven, which they bring with them in little baskets. Doris says this is very bad for little children; they should have a hot milky mid-day meal, and a breakfast at eight; but these nut-brown things seem to grow up into very pretty women, in spite of the absence of breakfast, and lunches of salad and cold meat. It is amusing to see them all bundling into the omnibus at four o'clock, so eager to get home. The driver goes from house to house, like a parcels postman, dropping each weary little child, with an empty basket, at their different doors; like all Sicilians, he has an abundant patience with children. In the inner courtyard of the palace there are a book-binder, a working goldsmith, a shoemaker, and a happy hatter, who scrubs and remodels cheap straw hats for ten cents, and a tailor body who mends old clothes, besides a carriage-builder who repairs old cabs with glue and tacks.

So, you see, there is a remnant of the patriarchal system still within the high walls of the palace of the Pignatelli-Cortez. All this is very Sicilian, and so is the exterior of the vast old palace, with its remnants of departed splendour. It is managed—or, rather, it manages itself—as no other pension-hotel ever was managed before or ever will be again: two little men-waiters, who have the instinctive sense of a woman and the physical endurance of a

Samson, and two very old women, who have been past work for many years, run the entire concern. The young padrone and his pretty wife live in a wing of the palace, entirely shut off from their guests. They have a pretty way of greeting you on your arrival, and of speeding the parting guest when the bill is paid, but in the interval—be it a week or a year—they are never within sight. Domestic work knows no distinction of sex in Sicily, so the old women are merely the drudges of the youthful waiters, who look after your entire wants, at least as entirely as you can expect for seven francs a day including wine. Pietro is really unique. I am afraid he must be a knave, for he is certainly no fool, and any man-servant is necessarily either the one or the other. A knave makes you comfortable and allows no one to cheat you but himself; a fool makes you uncomfortable and allows every one to rob you while he himself is honest.

In Sicily you live and learn; a little experience teaches you that there are more reasons than one why the ancients built their houses so high and made their streets so narrow. To exclude the sun was not the only reason; indeed, one often wonders if a little more warmth from the sun in the winter would not make up for the heat endured in August if the streets were a little wider; they are so bitterly cold all the winter. But the other enemy these narrow streets were built to keep out, is the sirocco. Last night it blew with all the abandonment of a Southern fury. Plants were uprooted in the old orange-garden and hurled into the high terraces. Trees were blown over like ninepins, and big windows completely shattered. All night long

there was a noise of glass falling and of doors being blown in ; the poor old palace seemed to be devastated from the roof to *basso*. I was thankful that in a Sicilian palace there are no chimney-pots, and that the original walls of the building are very strong.

While the wind lasts the air is hot and enervating, and the noise is hopelessly bewildering. It is the sort of wind that makes you lose your head. Every one in the palace was flying wildly about, in vain endeavours to keep old windows closed, or shut rebellious doors. For twelve hours, and more, this horrible storm made the gentle life of Sicily a hideous pantomime.

It is up in the high heavens that the sirocco howls and roars ; you can almost see it curling and writhing in the leaden sky. It has more evil in its character than any other wind I have experienced ; the blizzards of Canada are bad enough, and so is the mistral of the Riviera, but safe under the bedclothes you can get away from them both. In a sirocco, wherever you may be, you are part and parcel of the wind. You are twisted and torn and gathered up on high ; you are in the white dust which tears down the wide streets like the very smoke of hell ; you are, with the tall yuccas, laid low ; and you can feel the leaves of the date palms being tattered and torn like a shivering beggar's rags. The head grows giddy with the continual rising and falling of the bamboos and the swinging of the tall donax reeds. They are like the heaving and sinking of a ship on a stormy sea. Your nerves are reduced to such a state of exhaustion that you become the smallest atom of dust, caught up and carried high into the horrible storm.

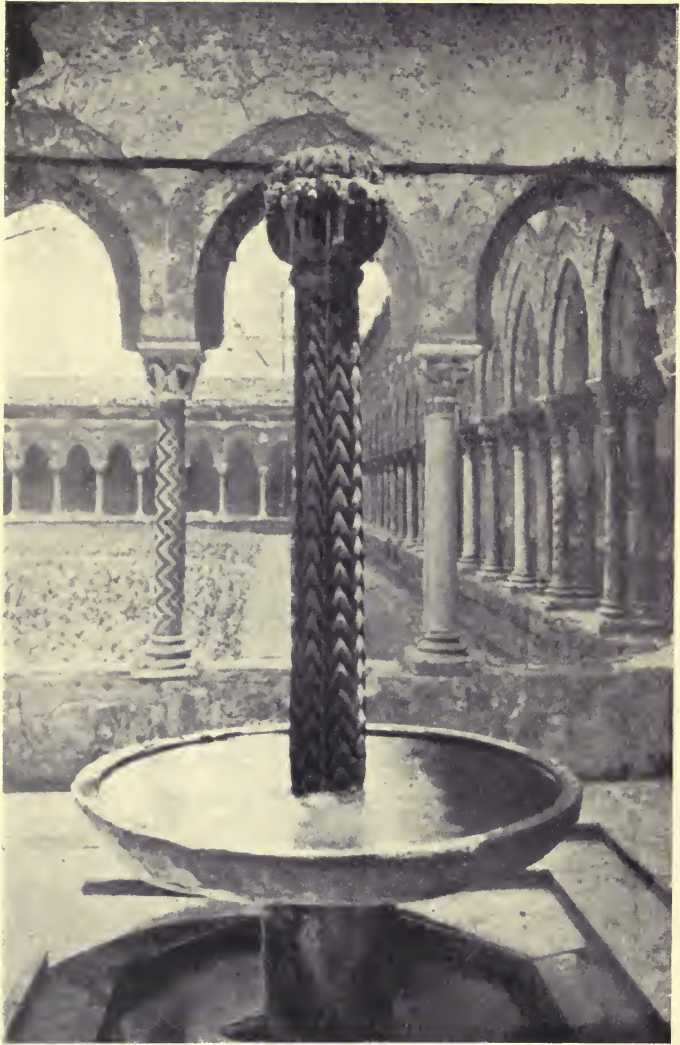
In the wide boulevards the devastation is complete, and the dust is blinding. When you see, in the distance, a white company of it charging down to envelope you and bruise you with the violence of its stones and grit, make a rush for the first narrow street, dash down any side alley. There is perfect safety there, although the air is still laden with the fevered breath of the sirocco, for the old builders of the city knew that the wind-god requires scope and freedom for the gathering up of his forces. The little slit of low, inky sky, showing between the high walls, is a different matter from the wide, terrifying heavens over the modern city; and the stone-paved streets, which will scarcely admit of the smallest donkey-carts passing, do not gather and keep the white dust. To-day things look tired and parched, and a cry goes up from all things living and growing for rain. Flowers are choked with dust, and the palm leaves are white; but nature recovers itself so quickly in the South that there will be no trace of this storm after one day's good rain.

I am rather overpowered by the number of excursions which one ought to take from Palermo, but at last I have seen beggarly Bagheria, the little village where all the big neglected country palaces belonging to Sicilian nobles are grouped. It is well worth seeing from a romantic and sentimental point of view, for these extraordinary palaces were built in the days when it was the mode for fashionable ladies to play at being milkmaids. Maria Caroline had no doubt introduced into far Sicily at Bagheria many of her ill-fated sister's picturesque fads and fancies. Twenty years earlier, Marie Antoinette,

weary of royal functions, had endeavoured to amuse herself by assuming the *rôle* of rustic simplicity. In the Little Trianon at Versailles, the royal milk-maid set the fashion in butter-making and pastoral flirtations. Proud princesses, in flowered muslins and floating ribbons, visited the pigs and drank milk in the daintiest of royal dairies.

But to-day everything in Bagheria is melancholy and depressing. The spacious grounds round these rapidly decaying mansions are neglected, and given over to weeds; each palace, as you view it in the distance from the high terrace of some lonely garden, seems more forlorn and forgotten than the last; and yet how gay they must have been in the heyday of their frivolity and grandeur! The pretty princesses and the courtly princes played at Arcadia not so many miles from their beloved city but that they could bring the town with them into the country. There is an absurdity about the architecture and decorations of some of these dilapidated buildings which quickly brings before you the frivolous and artificial life which was led by the people to whom they belonged—silly people, if you like, but highly romantic and happily picturesque.

Yesterday's storm was gathering in the skies when I drove on that lonely road to Bagheria. On the way I passed the little ruined church of San Giovanni dei Leprosi, founded by Roger the Great Count in 1071. A sad name and a melancholy little building it is to-day; the excursion generally left one depressed and lonely. Bagheria might look beautiful under a blue sky and in the clear bright Sicilian air; under a storm-laden sky and in the stifling atmosphere it breathed of decay and desolation.



"In the cathedral of Monreale." The most beautiful cloister in Europe.
[To face p. 244.]

How strikingly different is all the stucco splendour of Bagheria, which belongs to the decadence of Sicily, from the stately magnificence of the Stanza di Ruggero, as the Norman room in the Palazzo Reale is called! There may be in the Saracenic world some golden room which resembles this one of Roger the King in the Palazzo Reale, but I have not seen it; it is certainly the only one in Europe. Hitherto, when I have intended doing the royal palace I have failed to get farther than the Cappella Palatina. I cannot pass its doors. If I vow just one peep, it extends itself into delightful hours. But for once, I don't know how, I found myself in the hands of a licensed guide, who positively insisted upon my seeing the famous Stanza di Ruggero; and I'm glad he did insist, for I think that Norman room, with its walls encrusted with gold and green mosaics, and its dripping columns of rare marbles, placed more vividly before me the solid magnificence of the Arabo-Norman period in Sicily than anything else has done. This room of Roger the King is almost as glorious as his chapel, and more unique. You could not say it was a comfy or a homely room; but then, was there anything comfy in the days when your shirts were made of chain mail, and did these old Norman swells ever know the meaning of the dear word home, or the luxury of an armchair? When you are in this strange, Saracen-looking room, which reminds you more of a retired corner of a mosque than of a sitting-room, you cannot help hoping that Roger the King had some quiet little den in the palace, where alone with himself he could be a simple human man; for even he must have had those moments in his life when the

sympathy of snug surroundings and soft chairs is more desirable than the dignity of halls and marble benches inlaid with ivory.

For artists who make a study of mosaics there is plenty to keep them busy and interested in and around Palermo. Besides the world-famed mosaics in the cathedral of Monreale, which Baedeker says cover an area of 70,700 square feet and date from the twelfth century, there is the cathedral at Cefalu, which boasts of the most perfect and ancient mosaics in Sicily. The Christ of Cefalù is so often referred to by authorities on mosaic art that I suppose I must go and see it. It was finished in the year 1148, and is universally agreed to be one of the most imposing and impressive representations of our Lord ever executed in mosaic.

But if this hot wind lasts much longer I shall leave all these sights, which it seems so necessary to visit when you are living in a pension where guide-books are the only form of literature. When I get back to England it won't matter very much if I have seen the Cefalù Christ or not, or the famous Greek temple of Segesta, which stands all alone in the heart of the mountains. These things will not seem of such vital importance as they do to-day. I shall take refuge perhaps in the little mountain town of Taormina, which I once told you is the undisputed beauty of Sicily, or I shall get aboard the first good steamer bound straight for Marseilles.

In the absence of all war-news, the local papers are busy over the glories of the forthcoming Paris exhibition. As Italians dote on exhibitions, this latest news is even more popular than South Africa.

Yours,

J. C.

P.S.—I must tell you that while the storm lasted the shaved Swiss walked about the palace wringing his hands and ejaculating at intervals, “Ach, terrible-ness!” This is his persistent adjective at the present moment. When I told him I had visited Bagheria, and alluded to its decayed splendour, he responded with, “Ach, terrible-ness! terrible-ness!” The toughness of the ubiquitous kid at lunch is “terrible-ness,” and so is the noise of the church bells which never stop clanging in Palermo.

Your affectionate brother,
J. C.

PALERMO,
March 30th.

MY DEAR LOUISE,—

You want to hear more about Alice's boy, perhaps more than I can tell you, for my intimacy with him does not ripen as quickly as his has done with Doris, who has mitigated her first rather severe criticism upon him. He is, she now declares, much more sensible than the ordinary young man of his age, and really quite interesting when you get him on the subjects that interest him. With a woman's quickness she has, of course, discovered these subjects. I have not. The things he seems to be most interested in in Palermo are the Saints'-day and race-meetings, and the eating of ices in the Café Trinacria. Nothing seems to shock his stomach or impress his imagination. He has attached himself to Doris and her friends, who seem willing enough to fall in with his ideas of the proper way to see Palermo.

Poor little Doris! When I have passed their gay company once or twice, she has tried to look as if she was not enjoying herself, as if her gaiety was only assumed; but I have noted the new pretty white dress, and the dainty shade hat, which only partly conceals the bright flush on her cheeks; the instinctive feminine desire to preen her feathers to please the male bird is noticeable. There is a well-known Italian saying, *La donna savia è all' impensata, alla pensata è matta* (Women are wise off-

hand, but fools on reflection), which seems to me applicable to the subject.

This morning I went round to the Hôtel des Palmes to invite Doris to spend the morning with me in the Botanical Gardens. I was met by Jack, who told me, without mincing matters, that Doris couldn't possibly come, as they were all on the point of starting off to visit some old church out in the country, the name of which he couldn't pronounce. It turned out to be S. Maria di Gesù, one of the particular places I wished to show Doris. It was formerly a Minorite monastery, and is to-day one of the most picturesque things in Sicily. "Great Cæsar's ghost!" I said to myself, "fancy this gay company of fashionable sight-seers, headed by a German dragoman, going to disturb the repose of that quiet little cemetery, nestling under a hill, which is a veritable garden of wild-flowers!" Some brown-frosted monks are always busy, training the roses and tending the graves in their ancient cemetery, where many of the great of Palermo lie buried, or conducting a funeral service, when the tall candles burn steadily in that sheltered corner, but show a foolish light in the brilliant sunshine. On the flat roof of the whitewashed monastery one afternoon two contented brothers were seated watching a family of lately-hatched chickens take in their first impression of the world—a kindly world, and, viewed from this old-world spot, so beautiful, so quaintly picturesque, these chirping chickens must have been very favourably impressed concerning their hitherto very limited view. S. Maria di Gesù, with its wealth of wild-flowers and its glorious view of pink Pellegrino and its peaceful little monastery, which has a sunny white terrace

in front of it, paved with the ancient tombstones of departed Minorite monks, and a fountain with seven beasts, is just the sort of place where you lose all count of time, and think nothing matters so much as the beauty of Sicily.

As I passed back through the flower-scented cemetery, where the busy bees from the monastery hives were improving the shining hours, one of the brown-frocked monks presented me with a magnificent bouquet of roses. My arms were full of wild-flowers of the most interesting varieties, which I had gathered on the slope of the mountain. The monk shook his hairy head and pointed scornfully at them. "*Salvaggio*, signore," he said; "*salvaggio*, throw them away; they are not worth taking home." I was sure that Doris would prefer the new specimens of wild-flowers, gathered from the mountain, to the deep orange-coloured roses grown upon cherished graves, so, although I thanked him and accepted the roses, I did not throw away the crimsonest of wild anemones, or the pale feathery mauve flower which would have added glory to any English hothouse.

But I have been wandering, for I meant to tell you about the Botanical Gardens, where I found myself half an hour after Jack's party had started off in their fine two-horsed carriages on their visit to the Gesù. Jack had arranged things very nicely, and Doris blushed a little as I watched her take her seat by his side, chaperoned only by the German dragoman, who was, of course, posted on the box-seat beside the coachman.

"I wish you were coming," Doris said to me; "but you've been there, haven't you? You've seen the Gesù, and my friends arrange things all so pat that I haven't a word to say in the matter."

“ Don’t bother about me,” I said ; “ I can find lots to do in Palermo.”

“ Yes, but you are all alone ; it must be so dull ——” She paused for a moment, and then almost in a whisper said : “ Don’t think me horrid.”

“ I never could,” I replied. “ In my eyes you will always be charming.”

“ Now you’re unkind, and you *do* think me horrid,” she said. “ That’s the sort of pat little speech you make to nasty people whom you wish to say nice things to. Won’t you come with us?— we could easily make room for you in this carriage.”

“ Jack would have to sit back to the horses,” I said, “ on that little shelf which is scarcely wide enough to hold your guide-book. How do you think he’d like it?”

She smiled a little doubtfully.

“ He doesn’t like being uncomfortable certainly, but I’m sure he would be very glad . . . if you——”

“ There’s time enough to begin telling fibs on his account,” I said. “ Let me help you into the carriage and tuck the dust-rug closely round you, for the road to the Gesù is long and white and dusty. The little houses by the roadside are horribly poor and totally void of beauty. Every one seems to be waiting in a starving condition for something which never comes. The men and the women sit idle at their open doors, while the half-naked children play in the hot dust with the lean pigs and the fleas. When you arrive at the Gesù it seems like an earthly paradise, so great is the contrast.”

“ Poor starving Sicily !” she said ; “ it is, as you say, always waiting. ‘ *Il mondo è di chi ha pazienza* ’ is the motto you too often hear. If they

would remember that God helps those who help themselves it would be better for them.”

“ Perhaps they’ve ceased to believe that,” I said. “ God seems to have turned His face away from Sicily lately.”

* * * * *

Not in the best of humours, I lifted my hat as they drove off, and turned on my heel towards the Gardens. I didn’t care much what they were like, but it was somewhere to go and some cool place to rest in, while I considered Jack’s future prospects, and viewed him in the light of a husband for a girl who expected and enjoyed a large share of this world’s goods. As you know, I could argue nothing against him from a social or worldly point of view, for in that respect Alice’s marriage was a good one, and as I was a few years younger than Jack when she chose between me and a man with three times my income, I cannot complain of Jack being too young to know his own mind. Considering the case from Doris’s side, I think it’s a desirable match, for her home—now that her guardian has married again, and a woman whom Doris very much dislikes—will not be a happy one, and Doris must *not* be unhappy. She is one of those gay, feminine things born to be loved, and she is so accustomed to pleasant luxuries that Fate, if it be of the masculine gender, could never deprive her of her birthright. “ She that is born a beauty is born married,” so the people say here when they look at a girl like Doris, and it is very true. It would be impossible to consider Doris as an old maid, or even as an unmarried woman at thirty.

When I reached the Gardens, which are close to the Marina, my annoyance at Jack’s manner had

cooled down into something like self-pity. I was uncommonly sorry for myself, and at the moment not the least aware of the fact that I ought to have known better than to expect anything else. Youth is a human magnet, and middle-age is old-age to those who are young. "Man is fire, woman tow, and the devil comes and blows," and so it is nobody's fault; but the way Jack talks about "the things of *your* day, sir," when he addresses me, is, to say the least of it, a slap in the face.

In the Gardens there is a giant fig-tree from North Australia, which has formed a charming jungle, quite like a bit of a tropical forest. These Moreton Bay fig-trees, as the gardeners call them in Australia, throw down long arms to the earth, which take root and throw up fresh trunks into the sky, which again in their turn throw down arms and repeat the process of multiplying in the earth, until the one original root is the mother of many trees. There is something uncanny—as there is about all tropical vegetation—in these most prolific trees, for the trunks and arms are of a dull grey colour and smooth surface, which remind me of the thick texture and hue of a half-caste skin; like all fig-trees, this one is very markedly naked in appearance, even when in full leaf. The roots are of such a rebellious shape and immense size that, with Sicilian ingenuity, the gardeners have utilised them for armchair rustic seats. The tropical effect of the little jungle is heightened by the heavy trailing plants which have wound themselves round the smooth, grey suckers, and stretched themselves from arm to arm of this many-rooted tree. As I stopped beneath its dark shade, I could not quite recall what feature was missing to complete the

miniature tropical scene. Suddenly I recollected there were no brilliant parrots flocking in the deep green overhead, and the evil-speaking monkeys, which ought to have been lying and slandering together, as they swung themselves from branch to branch, were not there. I wondered if this particular sort of vegetation was invented solely for their benefit, for the linking together of the trees gives these wicked little folk an overhead path in the forest jungles, which must be very useful in the time of danger.

But instead of the chattering of monkeys, or the watery warblings of parrots, I heard a voice which suddenly carried my thoughts back to Syracuse and the orange grove in the deep-walled *latomia*.

It was the voice of Miss Rosina, but with a new note in it—not of tears to-day, but of womanly confidence in her powers as a woman who is loved. I listened for a moment. Would Miss Persephine answer? I did not expect so, for the quality of a woman's voice responds to the sex whom she is addressing. The vegetation completely screened her and her companion from my sight.

“Ach! but to loove and to be wise is not possible.”

I knew that voice, too, and the sound of it brought back to me one warm day on the river Anapus, and a short stout figure clad in a black mackintosh. I could see the slender hand of Miss Rosina, trailing her tapered American fingers through the water, and then a thick, freckled hand, a little hairy, slip into the water beside hers.

I could not help smiling as the words struck my ears, for nothing could ever convince me that a German would not be wise, however much he might

love. I did not hear Miss Rosina's answer. Perhaps she, too, did not care to be wise, but, like a woman, was urging impossibilities for the pleasure of receiving realities.

My guide, a most intelligent under-gardener, who was dressed in the usual gardener's uniform of butcher's blue linen trousers and long coat, gave me no chance of retiring before the lovers were aware of my presence, for he walked on ahead, close to the retired seat on which they were sitting.

Miss Rosina, with a woman's alertness, looked up; and when she saw me, a blush, which was really very pretty considering her age, bathed her fine skin. An arm in a tweed sleeve hung foolishly behind her seat: a more unemployed-looking arm I never saw; I was convinced it would commence work again the moment I was out of sight.

Our greeting was a little embarrassed. I noticed that Miss Rosina was dressed in the same delicate sort of silk, powdered with flowers, as she had worn at Syracuse, but that the professor—for I must no longer call him Herr Mackintosh—had on a tweed suit which, by its brand-newness, I am convinced had never been worn under a black mackintosh in hot weather.

“Love knows no measure,” I said to myself, repeating the old Italian motto, “*Amor non conosce misura*,” if even a German will buy fine feathers when he is in love. They were ready-made feathers, to be sure; that I could see at a glance, and Jack would have scorned them for his valet; but as all Germany is machine-made, and does not keep valets, that did not matter, and they did not fit their occupant so badly.

“How is Miss Doris?” Miss Rosina asked, the moment her fluttering breath would permit her. There was a look in both of their eyes as much as to say, “Why are you alone? You know that if you had been sitting with Miss Doris where we were sitting just now, and we had suddenly come into view, you would have looked quite as foolish.” “Not quite,” I thought; “but I will not tell you that,” for no man likes to own himself displaced, so I answered as tactfully as I could.

“Miss Doris is very well now but the hot wind of the last few days has tried her. She did not care to come to the Gardens to-day; she will be delighted to see you. At what hotel may I tell her you are staying?”

“At the Hôtel des Palmes,” the professor said. “We did vurst go to zee Hôtel Trinacria, but zee food was very weak, so I insist that Miss Rosina go to zee Hôtel des Palmes. She never eats nosing but zee ice creams.”

“Miss Doris is staying at the Hôtel des Palmes too,” I said. “Have you not seen her?”

“No,” Miss Rosina said. “We are only going there this evening; our luggage went this morning; our rooms are not ready yet.”

“Are you not then yourself at zee Hôtel des Palmes?” the professor asked, with a glint of humour in his bespectacled eyes.

“No,” I said casually, “I am at the Palazzo Monteleone—the old palace of the family of the great Cortez.”

“Ach! that is interesting, to be sure; and is it comfortable also?”

“It is amusing,” I said, “and that is better; for as Madame Politi used to say when people com-

plained to her of the food in her hotel, ' But, my dear sir, you did not surely come to Syracuse for the beef-steak, no so?' "

Miss Rosina laughed.

" The German ' so ' is very catching," she said ;
" I use it myself now."

" You will speak German directly," her admiring lover said : " already you understand a little ; you are very intelligent. So."

Miss Rosina shook her head.

" Your English is so good that I have no need to learn German."

" No, dat ess not so," he said almost sadly ; " but to know a lady you must say somesing."

" That is quite true," I said, " and I think you have managed very well, professor."

He took off his hat and bowed very low.

" I have progressed so well," he said, " zat Miss Rosina is to be my wife. I am very proud . . . but I should prefer that I make loove to her in my own language. She would like it much better."

I laughed, but he remained perfectly serious.

" Ach ! is it not so ? It is very difficult to express oneself agreeably to a sensitive lady in a leetle English."

I wondered if Miss Rosina had shown any shrinking when she had compared him with her " glorious lover " ; but as I looked at her it seemed to me she was quite pleased with her professor's proud air of possession, and quite ready for me to take my lonely way through one of the little paths which wind in and out of the fig-tree jungle. They would prefer that I should take the one which led out, and so I was agreeable.

Out in the bright sunshine everything seemed young and happy but myself. Blushing Miss Rosina, the proud, possessive German, the young nurse-girl who was flirting very prettily with an artillery soldier under the acacias, and, lastly, Doris and Jack. I thought of their two fair heads seated together side by side on some old tombstone out at the quiet Gesù. I am an old fool, I know, to grudge youth its light; but the blue sky overhead and the beautiful gardens, with the lotus pond where the papyrus whispered and looked cool, only made me feel my lonely state the more.

Even the Gardens failed to rouse me; but at last a cataract of red nasturtiums, which was pouring itself over the dark blades of a tall yucca, did bring an exclamation of pleasure to my lips. There is nothing Sicilians dislike so much as a distracted sightseer; they would rather show their flowers and curious specimens of bamboos, or whatever object of interest they have the care of, to a man who loved them well than to one who paid them liberally for their trouble.

In response to my praise of the charming effect of the falling nasturtiums, he at once dragged down a trail of their blossoms which he called Cappuccio, because they resembled in shape the hood of a Capuchin monk. Sicilians, like a primitive people, are fond of giving their flowers, as well as their beasts and friends, nicknames; and some of them are strangely apt and well chosen, though not always pleasant or flattering.

The trifoglio, which is *the* Sicilian weed *par excellence*, and carpets the orange and lemon groves all round Palermo with pale yellow, is in all its fresh glory just now; but the beautiful little flower, which

is as delicately spring-scented as our English primrose, is very provoking; it only opens its tender petals for a few hours each day, and quite surely they will be shut at the very time you take a journey out to some orange grove to see the golden glory of the fruit and the trefoil.

The leaves of this terrible little weed, which it is as difficult to root out of the land as it is to exterminate the rabbits in Australia, are very much like the Irish shamrock, and their green is as green as the young paddy fields in India. It is a merciful act of Providence that the ordinary Sicilian beast—I am not talking of cows, for they are extraordinary in Sicily—likes this beautiful weed which grows, as everything else does grow in the South, with immoral abandonment. It possesses the land with an unconquerable power, which paralyses the patient farmer.

Beautiful as a crop of this greenest of weeds looks, growing below the darker green orange-trees, whose golden fruit seems to have cast a reflection on the trifoglio, even to the blaze of yellow flower, it betokens ill for the condition of the orange-trees, for the trifoglio is far too greedy of soil to be a healthy companion for any fruit-trees. But the Sicilian orange and lemon industry has so fallen from its high estate since richer lands have flooded the market with their more carefully selected fruits, that the virtue of the soil is often stolen from their orange groves to give to some more paying crop of broad beans, peas, or artichokes, which replace each other in endless rotation under the shade of the orange groves.

It is, I think, the peel and not the fruit of the oranges and lemons which is now the paying in-

dustry in Sicily ; for here in Palermo, or in Syracuse, I have never seen the smallest piece of orange or lemon peel thrown away, whereas no one would thank you for the inside of the juicy fruit. Every one who knows Sicily well must be familiar with the smell of fermenting lemon peel. In every village or town you can see groups of men and women sitting in dark sheds or in the *bassi* of a high palace, quartering and gutting, like fish, stacks of freshly pulled lemons. I have often seen in the country a golden dunghill made of nothing else but fine orange or lemon-peel slowly decaying in the sun ; the air for half a mile or more being pungent with the smell of lemons in a decomposed state. I have been told that these dunghills are spirits of lemon in an immature state. I have no reasonable objection to make if that is the case, but I have my doubts whether it is not the inexpensive and ingenious way the Sicilian has of making lemonade.

Down at the Cala, both in Palermo and in Syracuse, I have watched ships being laden with immense casks which contain the rinds of quartered oranges and lemons ; sometimes these rinds are dry and sometimes they are juicy and in a state of fermentation. When this is the case, great care has to be taken of the cargo, and for weeks and weeks these casks, smelling strongly of lemons, will remain on the pier head. Each day they are turned and tapped by men who know their work. I have seen very few cargoes of fresh fruit shipped, which seems rather sad. In Palermo every little window has its string of orange peel hanging out to dry, and whenever an orange is eaten by a member of the household, or an extravagant stranger throws a piece of peel on the ground, the thrifty Sicilian adds

something to his golden necklace ; the chain grows and grows until it is looped and doubled across and across the small window or round a fine old Spanish balcony, for it is all part and parcel of Sicily to see the handsome black wrought-iron roses, with their fine curling leaves, which decorate these Spanish balconies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on the lofty palaces, wreathed and almost hidden with strings of dried and crumpled orange-peel. I do not think that the Sicilian housewife ever has any rags or bones to sell, for she boils down the one into soup and wears the other ; but the cry of the dried orange-peel hawker is as familiar in Syracuse and Palermo as the cry of the cats'-meat or rag-and-bone man is in London. If a Sicilian chances—which is not often—to buy an orange from a fruit-seller, and means to eat it then and there, he invariably returns the peel to the salesman, but if a stranger buys the orange, the man follows in his footsteps and picks up the skin. Such thrift is not known in England : it is the thrift of universal, patient poverty. Poor Sicily ! how much you have suffered, how little you have been rewarded !

This reminds me of a remark Jack made to-day when Doris and I were speaking upon this very subject.

“ Oh,” he said, “ the united kingdom of Sicily and Italy consists of those who are waiters and those who are waiting ! ”

Now when I have finished this long letter I find I have told you very little about the Botanical Gardens. Well, they are not so beautiful as the Villa Tusca or the garden of the Duc d'Orleans, but they have a repose and character quite of their own, and the variety of palms, aloes, yuccas, and

cacti is certainly greater here than in any private garden I have seen. There is an interesting collection of bamboos, some of which are quite forty feet in height. The specimen which particularly took my fancy had a rod of bright canary yellow. When I remarked on its beauty to the gardener—for in the clump they looked lovely, swaying about in the delicate foliage, which rustled just like a lady's silken skirts—he said, “*Si, si, signore*, they are very beautiful, but, like everything else, their gold turns to grey as they grow older. Look!” he added, pointing out some stems spotted like leopards, “those come from Brazil. In their first year they grow fifteen feet in height and are totally without leaves, with a curious bark like the scales of a fish. They lose these scales in their second year, when their skin becomes pale green; in their third year a few shoots are thrown out at right angles, and when they are four years old they are fully developed bamboos, with spotted rods quite twenty feet high and in luxurious leaf.” Lying on the ground in these groves of bamboos there were hundreds of lately dropped, delicate, silver-lined scales. There was something rather pathetic about them to me, though I scarcely know why. But doubtless it was because they were a visible token of lost youth.

The Botanical Gardens are, of course, kept up for the benefit of the university students, and therefore every tree and plant is marked very clearly with its proper Latin name. There are many pretty tricks in Sicilian gardening I wish I could carry home to England. Here the wide paths, for instance, were bordered on either side by two rows of moss-covered bricks, just wide enough apart and sufficiently deep

to carry a small flower-pot. These pots were filled all down one path with some delicate mauve flower, very similiar to the wild ones I gathered on the mountain behind the Gesù, and on another path they were filled with the smallest of pink roses. Pansies make a charming border in this way, and so do fuchsias. The beauty of the idea is that when your pansy pots are over, you can take them out and replace them with whatever pleases your fancy or the gardener has ready. The line of bricks does not look hard, at least not here, where moss and the old-fashioned penny-wort, and all sorts of small plants which find their home in stones soon cover them.

Yours,
J. C.

PALERMO,
April 20th, 1900.

DEAR LOUISE,—

I am looking for the last time at the little children down in the sunny courtyard tumbling into the long yellow omnibus, and I have said farewell to the old cab-mender and tailor-body, and the happy hatter who scrubs his leghorns at the fountain all day long and gathers the gossip of the palace for those who live in its inner courtyard—for a fountain is the people's club in Sicily and many topics are discussed there. Since Biblical times this drawing of water from the wells has played an important part in the lives of the people, whose customs never change. I have come to the conclusion that the hatter has the best time of any of the inhabitants of the palace, for he is sure to be in the courtyard when my lady of the black mantilla steps out of her carriage and disappears into the fencing hall, and there is always life at that fountain of some sort. A pretty girl, perhaps, accompanied by her mistress, will spend one golden hour washing a bunch of purple-rooted onions, while the hatter pulls and kneads and coaxes an antiquated leghorn into a more modern shape over a wooden block; or an old grey horse past even Sicilian use, accompanied by an old man still more useless, will limp its way across the cobble-stones and let its mouth rest in the cool water. Occasionally it will muster up just enough energy to draw in, with a hissing sound, a little water through its half-closed mouth, but it

seems best contented to look with cloudy eyes into the depths of the cool basin and moisten its lips on the surface.

The old man may be past work, but no Sicilian above ground is ever past talking, and so the hatter can have from the lips of the very person who saw it, a dramatic account of the murder which took place in the Giardino Inglese yesterday. A cavalry officer of noble family was walking with a popular actress in the broad daylight, when a rejected lover of the lady's shot him through the heart. I do not think that that hatter would exchange his lot with any well-paid clerk in the Bank of England, and small wonder too, for the moment he is tired he will leave the leghorn to soak, and stretch himself out on his back on the warm stones, and sleep with his face turned upwards to the dark, over-spreading, stone-pines. No one disturbs a sleeping man in Sicily.

I am writing this in my last hours in Sicily; I have made up my mind to sail for Naples to-night.

The old Englishman, who is always packing up his trunks to go home, announced his intention of coming by the same boat with me; indeed, he kept up the farce until an hour ago, when he bounded into my room in great distress. Alas! he had just received some letters which would detain him in Palermo for a few days longer. When Miss Rosina came to see me the other day (I was recovering from a slight attack of fever, which had kept me in my room for a couple of days) I heard the old hum-bug say to her as she was passing under the corridor:

“ My dear lady, although my acquaintance with you is very slight, I am going to ask you do me a great favour. I have the very worst taste in the

world ; I would not dare to choose anything for any one except myself : *would* you be good enough to help me to select some pottery for a bazaar which my sister is getting up for the war fund in England?"

I did not wait to hear Miss Rosina's answer, but I hope he heard my exclamation " D——d old fool !" as I shut my door.

You will have guessed, Louise, with a woman's quick wit, why I am leaving Sicily. It has always been a land of strong contrasts to me, and I do not wish to be one of the many who sit in the shade. I, who have basked in her sunshine, dread the shadows and the sadness.

I said good-bye to Doris yesterday, amid a gay company at the Hôtel des Palmes. She seemed a little taken aback when I told her I was really going, and that I had come to say good-bye. I believe she would gladly have spent my last day in Palermo with me, but Jack had not the slightest intention of letting her do so. He at once reminded her of the invitation she had accepted to lunch and play tennis with the W——s, an English family who have lived here for three generations, and who have one of the most delightful gardens in this city of gardens. I don't know if Doris expected me to express my regret more openly at having seen so little of her for the past week, but I thought she looked pale and pained when I said good-bye. How unnaturally old friends can behave when they are surrounded by conventionalities and unnatural people ! for not once did Doris lift her eyes to mine, even when I held her hand at parting, and I behaved in the most cold-blooded fashion.

" What time do you leave to-morrow ? " she said.

" At 7.30 p.m., from the Molo," I answered.

"I can't believe you are really going, and that I am to be left here; you are a part of Sicily to me."

"But I have seen so little of you in Palermo," I said a little impatiently; "my going away can make no difference now."

"Still, you were here," she said hurriedly, "and although I didn't see you I knew you were near, and now we are parting just like any other chance acquaintances of travel."

The day after.

I was interrupted yesterday, and had to leave off suddenly, for such an amazing thing happened, that my boxes are all unpacked and the boat has sailed to Naples without me. I was telling you of my farewell with Doris at the Hôtel des Palmes, when Pietro knocked at my door and asked me at what hour I would like the carriage ordered to convey me and my luggage to the Molo. The carriage, you must know, is the identical cab I watched being mended with a pot of glue and a *soldo* worth of ink; I could see it in the courtyard down below, but Pietro gave it the dignified name of *grande carrozza*.

After consulting Pietro as to how long it would take to drive to the Molo, I told him to order the *grande carrozza* for 6.45. It had been waiting all the afternoon for the job, and the driver had adorned himself in a pair of very papery patent-leather boots in honour of the occasion, and had cracked his whip with a "Hulloa! are you there?" sound in it at intervals of two minutes below my bedroom window with amazing insistence. A smile from me was sufficient to assure him that he was to have the billet.

"Pietro, come back," I cried, as he ran to give the order.

"*Si, si, signore.*"

“Pietro.”

“*Si, si, signore; subito, subito.*”

“Pietro,” I said, “there is one thing I wish to see before I leave the Palazzo Monteleone.”

“*Si, si, signore comandi.*”

“I wish to see the middle portion of that white horse on my ceiling; it is in the room which is occupied by the lady who wears orange-blossom in her hair.”

“*Si, si, signore.*”

Pietro was too well-bred to smile at the recollection of that bridal head.

“I will wait in the salon,” I said, “until you find out if the lady is out, and it is safe to invade her room.”

“*Si, si, signore.*”

The salon was empty; and, as I sat there waiting for Pietro, who took a very long time to find out such a simple affair, I felt like a London caretaker when the family is out of town, for the salon, which is entirely furnished out of the relics of the ancient Pagnatelli splendour, is always kept strictly under loose linen covers. “Ah, dear patched-up Sicily!” I thought, as I looked at the various periods in the decadence of the room. “How can I ever leave you?” How typically Sicilian everything was! The glorious proportions of the salon, the elaborate and costly mouldings so sadly in want of repair, the effective but gaudy ceiling, representing some questionable classical subject, full of vigour and wanton action; the enormous chandeliers, of what might or might not be rock crystal tied up in yellow gauze; the terrible pictures of vulgar Madonnas nursing leering babies, and the rather too realistic representations of Leda and the swan, reclining over doorways and windows.

When I was comparing the past with the present, and wondering upon what occasions the linen covers were removed from the formal furniture and the yellow gauze taken off the chandeliers, Pietro suddenly appeared, and bowed himself across the slippery floor.

“*The bellissima signorina Dorees è a basso, signore,*” he said.

Pietro always ripples with smiles when he thinks he is the bearer of good news.

“Invite the signorina upstairs,” I said. “Is she alone?”

“*Si, si, signore,*” he replied, rippling still wider.

In a few moments Doris appeared, and Pietro ushered her in with a magnificent bow. The old serving-woman who lives and sleeps in the cold passages, and to whom Doris had presented, when she left the palace, a five-franc piece (the poor old thing usually receives the crumbs which fall from Pietro’s tips, as he keeps her well out of sight when the guests are departing) and a pretty girlish hat, toddled after Doris the whole length of the sun-gallery, which is stolen from the salon on the southern side, muttering caressing words and at frequent intervals kissing the hem of her gown. Pietro waved her imperiously away, and called her “an old fool” in excellent English. Pietro’s favourite English expression when I first came here was “All right”; but since Doris explained to him that it was very rude, he has never used it. He does not quite grasp the meaning of “old fool,” but he has heard the *forestiere* speak of the poor drudge by that title so many times that he has added it to his list of English expressions.

When Pietro left the room, Doris began talking very hurriedly about the weather, the hot wind and so forth, expressing a hope that I should have a calm passage to Naples.

"We never used to talk about the weather, Doris," I said. "It was very kind of you to come to say good-bye, but don't let us waste time over weather and politenesses. Tell me something about yourself: what have you been doing? did you enjoy the luncheon-party and the tennis? How did you spend the evening? There was a glorious moon."

She did not answer any of my questions, but played nervously with the bunch of charms on her long chain.

"Well, have you nothing to tell me?" I said. "I have been trying to pass the time one has to spend indoors by going on with my story. Louise asked me to finish it, but I told her that it must wait—the story must finish itself."

"Our poor little story," she said almost tenderly: "it takes me right back to dear Syracuse."

"Would you like to be back in Syracuse?" I said. "Are you as sorry as I am that we ever left it?"

I got a woman's answer. "It would be very hot there now on that bare Achradina. Think of the sun on those white rocks!"

"I can think of the cool *latomia*," I said. "Have you forgotten the Garden of Theocritus?"

"Oh no," she said, "the lovely cool dark *latomia*! But somehow my memory of Syracuse is white and sunny and glittering. I want to shade my eyes when I think of it."

“Are you still of the same opinion,” I asked: “that the girl would have preferred the elderly lover; that the young man’s coming need not have altered her feelings towards him? or are you able to understand the situation better now?”

As I paused for an answer, which I thought I had received by the crimson which dyed her clear cheeks, the bells of the Olivella started their unmusical clapping for evensong, and the big salon vibrated with their din. I took one unresisting hand in mine.

“Don’t you agree?” I said, trying to catch a glimpse of her frank eyes; “don’t you agree now that youth can only find complete sympathy and understanding in youth—that the young man’s coming showed her the true nature of her feelings for the elderly one?”

I had to wait some moments for an answer, and when it came I was puzzled.

“I wish I knew,” she said, “I wish I knew; that’s just what I came to see you about. Oh, you mustn’t go away and leave me!”

“But how can I help you?” I said. “My opinion is unaltered.”

“I believe you want the girl to marry the young man,” she said hotly; “you think the other man was glad to get rid of her.”

Our eyes met at last, and before hers were withdrawn the little spark of defiance had died out of them, and something else had stolen in.

With a scarcely perceptible movement she slipped from her stiff linen-covered chair to her knees on the floor and buried her bright head on my shoulder; a little tremble ran through her as I touched her pretty hair.

Without lifting her head she drew one glove off, and a hand was held out for my inspection. Perhaps she did not notice the start of surprise I gave when I saw the ring; she certainly could not have guessed why I looked at it so long.

“Did the young man put it there?” I asked, “and yet you are uncertain?”

She looked up at me again, with eyes as troubled as an unforgiven child’s, and as full of tenderness as a woman’s—such blue, entreating eyes.

“It was the moonlight,” she said, with a voice full of apology, “the moonlight and the marina. I couldn’t help it. He insisted, and everything was so Southern and romantic. Oh! it’s so difficult for a girl to say ‘No’ when—when——”

“When she loves the man,” I said, finishing the sentence for her.

A little sob burst from her lips, and the words:

“But I don’t love him, I don’t love him, that’s just it. Oh, won’t you ever understand?—I don’t love him one scrap in the broad daylight, in the unromantic hotel. I never would have let him put it on my finger, or hope for a moment, if it hadn’t been for the moon and the marina and the music; and I had been so lonely and miserable all day.”

“But, dear child,” I said, “you surely have not promised to marry him if you don’t love him; there is no earthly reason for your doing so?”

“I haven’t,” she said. “I haven’t promised anything; I only allowed him to hope I’m free yet. We were sitting on the marina together, listening to the band and watching other people making love,—I think that sort of thing is infectious,” she said, with a little laugh,—“and Jack was in one of his nicest moods. I knew he was very fond of me, and

I was so lonely. You were going away, and our good-bye had been so horrid, I couldn't help just letting him like me a great deal; and then it kept getting nicer and nicer—the feeling that, after all, some one, even if it was only Jack, really liked me and wanted me to love him.”

I stroked her hair as if I understood.

“It was all your fault, every bit of it,” she said; “so don't despise me. I just couldn't snub any one who was kind to me, and when he put his arm round my waist, I wanted to cry and to be loved a great deal; and Jack was there, and of course he must have thought all that meant that I loved him, and it was only because I was so miserable. Why did you ever send me away?” she said suddenly, springing to her feet.

“I send you away, little one?” I said. “What about the ladies in the salon in the evenings?”

“If I had stayed,” she said, “and I had felt like that—like I did on the marina, I could have cried with you, and then I wouldn't have got into such a bother.”

“And might I have loved you a great deal?” I asked. “Would you have snubbed me?”

“You would never have done it,” she said, with a little sigh and a provoking blush. Jack took this old-fashioned ring off his watch-chain, and before I knew what he was doing he had slipped it on my finger. It was his mother's ring; he says it was given to her by the man she wronged, and she asked Jack never to put it on the finger of any woman but the one he meant to marry.”

“And you left it there,” I said, “and by so doing you gave your silent consent.”

“ I was going to take it off there and then, but he implored me to wear it until I had considered the matter for a day or two. He begged so hard and looked so sad that I couldn’t be unkind. Poor lady !” she said, turning the ring round and round. “ Jack says she was very unhappy. She was only my age when she died ; girls married so young in those days, didn’t they ?”

“ Yes, and those old days were my days, little Doris,” I said, as I drew her unresistingly closer to my side. “ For it was I who put that very ring on her hand. You see, I am old enough to have been Jack’s father.”

“ You were the man who gave that ring to Jack’s mother !” she cried in amazement. “ You were the man his mother wronged ! Oh ! surely it isn’t true ? I can’t believe it !”

Her lips trembled, and her dear eyes became little blue lakes of tears.

“ Yes,” I said ; “ it seems incredible to you, but it is quite, quite true. I am getting an old man, you see.”

She began pulling off the ring.

“ Then I can’t wear it another hour,” she said. “ No, I can’t wear it. You loved Jack’s mother, and she treated you cruelly. I know she did. Jack told me all about it, and how she regretted it ; and yet I have never heard you speak bitterly of any woman. But that is the reason why you”—she hesitated for words—“ why you won’t allow yourself to love any one else. Perhaps you are afraid to trust a woman ?”

“ I have forgiven Alice long ago,” I answered, “ although I never forgave the man who robbed me of her, so you need have no feeling about the ring.”

I tried to put it back on her finger. "The wound in my heart which I thought was healed many years ago has troubled me a little lately, for it seems hard that it should be *his* son who is now to rob me of you, his son who is to have Doris : I am to be robbed again in the second generation of the dearest thing in life. Oh ! little one," I said, when I saw the pain I was inflicting, "forgive me for saying this. I am a brute to cast the shadow of my spoilt life on the brightness of yours."

"I can't marry Jack," she said ; "that settles it." A happier look came into her eyes as she spoke. "I will tell him so to-night. I will tell him the whole truth, that I don't love him enough to marry him. He has amused me and been awfully kind to me, and he's ever so much nicer than you think ; but as a husband he would bore me to death." She laughed a little nervously. "Don't think me flippant and a dreadful flirt, but a girl can't think of all that when she is being made love to for the first time ; and Jack makes love very well indeed—he loses all his indifference then." Her eyes conveyed a stronger protest than her words.

"You are saying all this for my sake, Doris," I said ; "but surely I would rather see Alice's boy marry you than any other man."

"Why should I marry any *other* man?" she said. "I am not one of S. Pasquale's girls."

"No," I said, "but remember the old Italian motto, 'She that is born a beauty is born married.' It is the natural course of events for a girl like you to marry. And I need not be dog in the manger about it because I can't marry you myself ; I needn't poison your mind against the fellow who is going to do it."

“ I suppose *you* can’t marry me yourself?” she said, as simply as if she were asking me why I couldn’t go out for a walk with her.

“ I suppose as a wife I would bore you awfully, just as much as Jack would bore me as a husband ; but I might improve. I shan’t always be so young ; women soon get over that !”

“ Doris,” I said, “ don’t be cruel ; my heart is sore enough already.”

“ I was trying to be kind,” she said gently ; “ I don’t want you to be robbed again.”

There was something in her eyes and attitude which gave me courage to tell her the only way I could see to prevent it, but I can’t tell you, Louise, what I said, or how exactly it came about ; but when Doris was in my arms telling me that I had driven her into proposing, and that she knew she loved me ever since the day she left for the Hôtel des Palmes, the salon door was flung wide open and the shaved Swiss hurried in (he is always in a hurry and has a habit of knocking over furniture). He suddenly stopped when he saw the look of embarrassment on Doris’s face. “ Ach ! terrible-ness !” he said, as he spilt a small table in his anxiety to get out of the room. “ Please to excuse me. I did not understand that zee salon was so engaged ; I make great apology.”

The bells of the Olivella were still filling the room with sound when the professor and Miss Rosina were ushered in. I think the professor grasped the situation very quickly, for he took both my hands and wrung them most horribly (the professor’s hands are not pleasant in warm weather, but I was not in the humour to resent such trifles).

“ Dis is goot,” he said. “ Already you can understand what happiness I feel ; I am very rejoiced—so.”

Miss Rosina looked inquiringly from Doris to me.

"We came to say good-bye," she said, in a mystified air. "We thought you were going away. I don't quite understand."

The professor stepped carefully across the polished floor to Doris, who was looking divinely foolish; he shook hands very elaborately.

"I make my best congratulations to you, Miss Doris," he said very gravely; "for one so young you have made a wise choice."

Miss Rosina then added her timid congratulations to that of her lover's, and at that embarrassing moment Pietro bowed himself into my presence, trying to assume a mournful expression.

"*Prego, signore*," he said, "*la grande carrozza e pronta*." He spoke with an air of apology, as though it were rude of him to tell even a paying guest that the cab was waiting to take him away. Pietro always speaks pigeon Italian to his English guests; he never throws his irregular verbs or fine idioms before swine, or perhaps his politeness compels him to murder his own beautiful language to suit the intelligence of the *forestiere*.

"Pietro," I said, "I shall not require the carriage. I am not going to Naples to-night."

"Signore," he said, with a little ring of distress in his voice; he had seen a vision of a ten-franc note held out to him and then rudely withdrawn, but his good manners asserted themselves, and he said, "The illustrious signore will honour our house by staying a few days longer, *grazie, grazie?*"

"Yes, Pietro, I have changed my mind. Go and give the cabman three francs out of that, and keep the rest for yourself." As I put ten francs into his hand he looked keenly at Doris, and his face lit up with an exceeding great intelligence.

“ The *bellissima signorina Dorees* has been kind, signore. *Non si dice mai tanto una cosa che non sia qualche cosa,*” he said to himself, with a knowing little laugh, which practically means that “ There was some truth in the gossip, after all.”

“ Yes,” I said, “ and perhaps it was the little pitchers of the palace which spread the gossip, for in Sicily I believe they have very long ears.”

Yours affectionately, J. C.

Lieut-Col. ANDREW C. P. HAGGARD, D.S.O.

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